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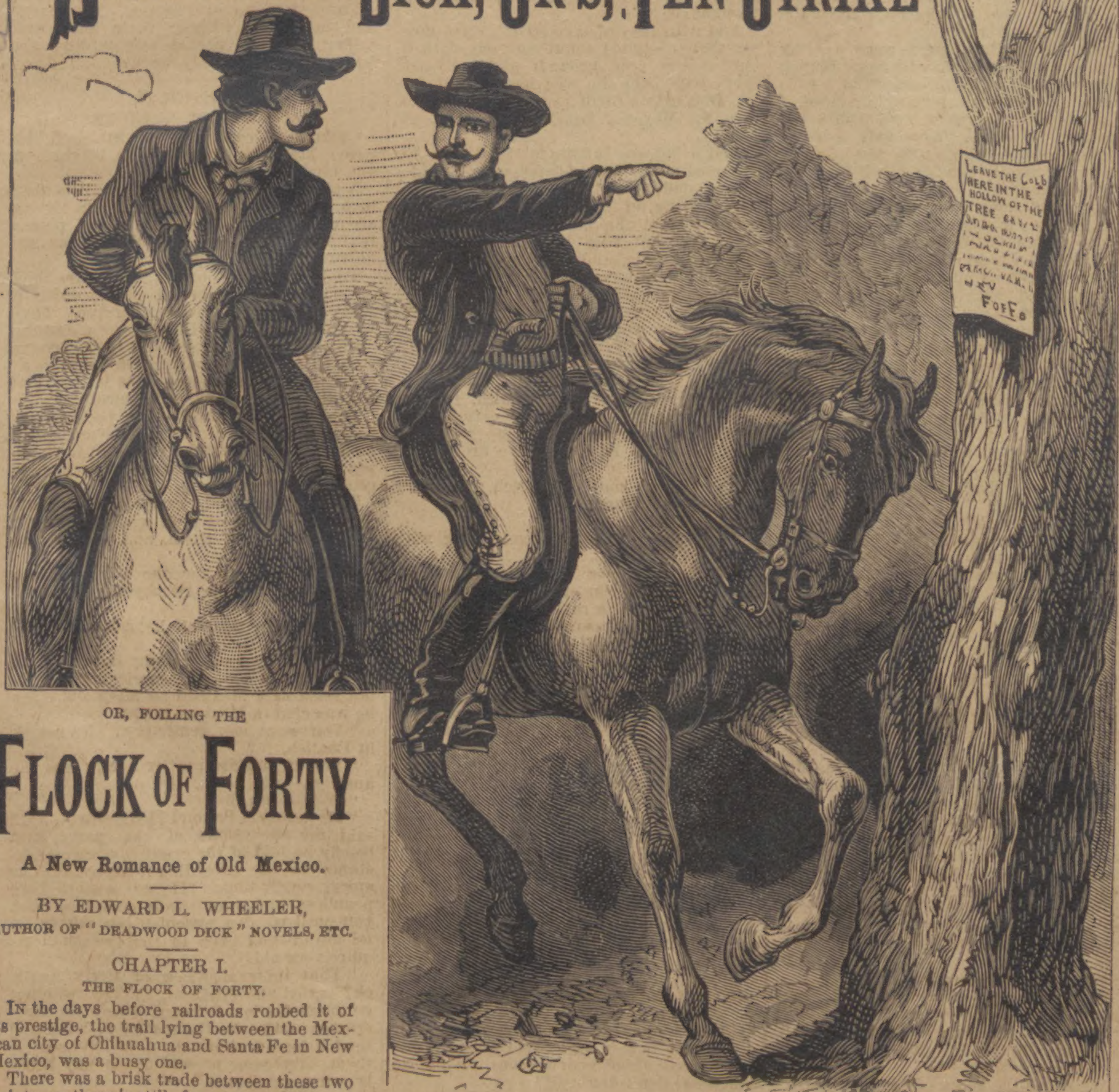
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DEADWOOD DICK, JR'S, TEN-STRIKE



OR, FOILING THE

FLOCK OF FORTY

A New Romance of Old Mexico.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE FLOCK OF FORTY.

In the days before railroads robbed it of its prestige, the trail lying between the Mexican city of Chihuahua and Santa Fe in New Mexico, was a busy one.

There was a brisk trade between these two points, as there is still, for matter of that, as

"LOOK THERE!" CRIED SONORA SAM. "WE HAVE DIRECTIONS WHAT TO DO!"

well as between Chihuahua and the United States generally, and it was along this trail that the Mexican bandits plied their avocation with most vigor.

After the coming of the railroads the old trail lost much of its patronage, indeed, nearly all, so far as concerned the interchange of merchandise between the two countries. The mails, too, went by rail, of course, and what was left for the old trail was but a meager pittance of its former traffic.

Under these circumstances, naturally, the bandits, to a large degree, had to abandon their vocation or seek pastures new.

Latterly, however, the old trail was livened by a new and distinct class of travelers, people of means, who, for sake of the unique pleasure it afforded them, as compared to travel by rail, journeyed from point to point in the good old style.

This had come to be more and more in vogue with a certain favored class, in suitable season, and the bandits were not long in finding their occupation returning; or, if not they, then other bandits sprang into existence, who ably filled the places of those of yore, and the sense of danger occasioned by these gentlemen of the road added zest to the enjoyment of the more venturesome travelers.

These, for the most part, were wealthy Americans, with occasionally some British subjects struck with the same "fad."

Along this old trail, toward the close of a summer day, between two points not necessary to particularize, a body of horsemen were riding. They were pushing forward in the hope of reaching their stopping place before dark.

They were Americans, and the leading spirit of the party was a man apparently past the middle of life in actual number of years, yet who rode with as much hearty enjoyment as the youngest member of the company, and with seemingly as much youthful vigor.

The party numbered six, and, with their two Mexican guides, made eight, all told.

Samuel Hedgeworth, the gentleman particularized as the head of the company, was a millionaire railway magnate, and with him were his son, Samuel, Junior, and four friends.

"Father, do you think we can make it before dark?" the son made inquiry.

"I hope we shall, Sammy," was the cheerful response.

"Well, I doubt it."

"Why do you doubt it?"

"Did you not notice our guides shaking their heads dubiously a moment ago?"

"No, I did not. It cannot be more than five miles to the town we are heading for, and there ought to be an hour of daylight left, I should think. The time is all our own, anyhow."

"I will ride forward and ask the fellows what is the matter, for it is plain to be seen that something is amiss."

The guides were a little distance in advance.

Touching his horse, Hedgeworth, Jr., dashed forward and joined them, they looking around as he approached.

"What do you think about our reaching our stopping place before darkness overtakes us, guides?" he inquired, in passable Spanish. "I noticed you shaking your heads about something."

"We can reach there if nothing happens, senior," one made reply.

"If nothing happens?"

"Si, senior."

"What do you mean, my man?"

"Have you not noticed the trail? Have you not seen the indications?"

"Why, no. What do you refer to? Ah, the tracks? Is that it? What do you consider them to signify?"

"We dread the Flock of Forty, senior."

"The band we have heard about, and against whom we are warned?"

"Yes."

"Then we had better be prepared for them, had we not? Were you not going to mention your apprehensions to us?"

"We had about decided to do so, senior, when you rode up."

The two guides drew rein then, and awaited the arrival of the rest of the party, who joined them in a few moments.

"What is the matter?" Mr. Hedgeworth demanded. "What is it, Sammy?"

"They fear that band of forty thieves we have heard about," the son answered. "There are indications along the trail which they do not like."

"The mischief! Then we had better press forward with all haste, I suggest, and try to escape them. While I have no fear of such fellows, yet we may as well avoid them if we can."

"They are to be feared, sir," said one of the guides, who spoke English.

"Yes; but we are all armed, and—"

"Hands up!"

So sudden, so ringing the order, and so entirely unexpected at the moment, that it was obeyed before resistance was thought of.

And with the order, or so quickly following that it seemed simultaneously with it, out of the very ground, seemingly, on every hand, like the wild horde of Roderick Dhu called forth to amaze Fitzjames, rose up Mexican bandits armed to the teeth.

And a hideous-looking lot they were for the most part. The indispensable kerchief was wound around each head, their broad hats resting on top of that. One or two differed from the general lot in this respect in that they were clad in semi-American style, and wore masks beneath their wide-brimmed slouch hats. One of the latter was the chieftain.

"Not a move," he immediately added, "if you value your lives."

"What do you want?" demanded Mr. Hedgeworth, who, though pale, showed spirit.

"Well, we want your wealth, for one thing," was the cool response, "and incidentally you yourself. Let me warn you that resistance is useless; we are five to your one."

"You want me?" the rich railroader cried, in amazement.

"Exactly."

"And what do you intend doing with me?"

"Well, no reason why that should be concealed from you or your friends. We shall hold you for a ransom, and if it is not forthcoming in reasonable time, your life must pay the forfeit. Can I make it any plainer to you than that? Hold! Do not try it, young man!"

This last to Hedgeworth the younger, who seemed tempted to reach for a weapon of defense in spite of the odds against them.

"It will be certain death," one of the guides whispered to him.

Consternation and dismay seized the party, now, finding themselves in so helpless and so serious a dilemma, and yet Mr. Hedgeworth himself appeared to exhibit more of rage than of fear.

"You shall pay for this outrage!" he thundered. "You shall pay dearly for it!"

"No; you will do the paying," was the grim response.

The chief of the band gave a signal, and ten of his followers advanced and quickly disarmed the travelers and their guides.

"There, now we have pulled your teeth," said the leader, "just oblige us by handing out all the money and valuables you happen to have about your persons. We mean business—don't doubt it!"

It was impossible to doubt it.

"Do you mean to rob us of every cent we possess?" cried Hedgeworth. "We have got to live, you scoundrels!"

"And so have we," retorted the bandit chieftain, nonchalantly. "You have got plenty more, and you will never miss these little drops. Wait till we tap your pocket for the big boodle!"

"You will never get a cent, curse you!"

"Oh, yes, we will; life is sweet, and you will come down with the goods when it comes to the pinch. But this is fooling away time; hand out your money, unless you want my men to relieve you of it the same as they have already relieved you of your arms."

It was a bitter pill, but it had to be swallowed. They were forced to surrender whatever of value they had about them. Meanwhile, Mr. Hedgeworth's hands had been tied, and himself securely roped fast to his seat in the saddle. These things attended to, the captain of the band ordered the party to ride on, save Mr. Hedgeworth, and concerning him he said that negotiations for his release would be opened with his friends in the city of Chihuahua, as speedily as possible.

There was no alternative. The party had to go on without their host, and father and son parted sorrowfully, the latter vowing a speedy rescue.

CHAPTER II.

A DREAM OF REVENGE.

Chihuahua, capital of the State of like name, lay basking under the bright sun and blue sky of a perfect day.

A city of no mean importance, it is also, in a way, a place of beauty. Its streets are cleanly, and its markets and plazas inviting. True, many of the streets are narrow, but all are picturesque.

To the entrance of an American hotel on one of the principal plazas came a party of horsemen numbering five. They were dust-stained and travel-worn, and the crowd of water-carriers and burro-drivers stopped in their lazy fashion to gaze at them, for the party looked as if they had met with some rough experience.

That they were Americans, their habiliments proclaimed. They were evidently men of means, though at present their appearance did not betoken that they had recently fared well.

They dismounted, gave their animals into the keeping of men who came forth to take charge of them, and entered the building.

The spokesman for the party was a young man, maybe twenty-five years of age.

In passable Spanish he asked for the proprietor.

His request soon brought out the man he desired to see—an American by birth, but seemingly Mexican by adoption, since he was clad in Mexican attire.

"You want me, gentlemen?" he asked, in English.

"Yes, if you are master here," was the answer.

"Well, I am."

"My name is Samuel Hedgeworth, Jr.," said the spokesman of the party, and briefly he told of the event that gives substance to the preceding chapter of our story, concluding: "Hence, we are here penniless, and must throw ourselves upon you until we can replenish our purses by telegraph—and even in that we shall require your aid."

"That infernal Flock of Forty again, eh?" cried the landlord. "They will not go much farther, I fancy, before the Government will take the matter in hand and send a force to hunt them out and scatter them. But your present needs—my house is yours, gentlemen."

"I thought we would not appeal to an American in vain," said the young man, thankfully. "I will telegraph for funds immediately, and then must take steps at once toward my father's rescue."

"Easier said than done, I am afraid," observed the landlord.

"Why so?"

"The size of the band, the reputation they have made for themselves, and the dread in which they are held; you will find it difficult to get men."

"Money will provide them, no matter what the difficulties in the way of success."

"Cowardly hirelings are not to be trusted."

"What then can I do?"

"Ah! I have it. Strange that I did not think of him at once. Have you ever heard of Deadwood Dick, Junior?"

"The noted detective? Who has not heard of him? Can it be possible that he is within reach? If so, and I can get hold of him, I have no fear as to the outcome."

"He was where you stand this minute only a week ago."

"Possible?"

"The fact. And I think he is still in town."

"Then I must find him, and at once. Can you tell me where I will be likely to fall in with him?"

"I can, and will. But, sir, you must think a little of your own needs first. A bath and dinner will make a new man of you—also your party, and then we will find Deadwood Dick."

Two hours later these same men looked like different persons.

"Now," said their host, speaking to Hedgeworth, "to put you on the trail of Deadwood Dick."

"Yes, not another minute must be wasted," said the young man, showing impatience. "If he is in the city I must see him and give him the particulars of the matter."

"Well, he was stopping here, but is now with Sigmund Bamford, one of our most wealthy merchants, himself an American. I will have a boy take you to his place of business, or to his residence; if not there, and if the man you seek is not in town he can no doubt direct you where to find him."

Following his guide, Hedgeworth was presently shown into one of the largest and handsomest business houses in the city.

His inquiry for Mr. Sigmund Bamford brought forward a fine-looking old gentleman.

"You desire to see me?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir. I want to make inquiry concerning a gentleman who has been stopping with you for a day or so—"

"Ah! It must be my son you wanted to see, sir; Sigmund Bamford, Junior. I have to tell you that he is not at present at home; he left the city a few days ago in company with that gentleman."

"Then I am too late!"

"You wanted to see that gentleman?"

"Yes, if it was Deadwood Dick, Junior, I did, and badly."

"Come, let us talk in private, young man. No reason why we should be overheard." And the old gentleman led the way to a private office at the rear of the establishment. "Now, then, can I do anything for you?"

"I am afraid not, sir, unless you can put me on track of this Deadwood Dick, so that I can get hold of him within a day or two."

"Impossible, I am afraid. My son and he have gone upon an important mission."

"It cannot be of greater importance than this of mine."

"Well, as to that I cannot say, of course."

Any harm to inquire what it is you have for Deadwood Dick to do?"

Briefly young Hedgeworth told his story.

"It is too bad you missed them," said the old man, when he had heard. "Deadwood Dick's mission here is to hunt out this very band of rascals, and my son has gone with him upon that dangerous mission."

"They must be strong friends, I should imagine."

"Not so much that as that my son has engaged him upon another matter, and both businesses together have taken them to the same place. I will tell you the story if you care to hear it. Very well, then, here it is:

"Twenty years ago, when my son came here and established himself in business, the only person engaged in the same line was one Franklin Furniss, and he had a monopoly of all the trade. He hated my son from the first. Conducting business upon a fair basis, my son's trade increased gradually, and that of Furniss as steadily went down. There was no trickery, you understand; it was fair competition in the open market; my son succeeded, and Furniss failed."

"Well, the man had to fly the city, for he was thousands in debt, and, worst of all, it was discovered that he was a forger as well. Had he been found, I believe he would have been hanged. When he went it was with vengeance avowed that he would in turn ruin my son. But nothing more was ever heard from him, at any rate not openly. My son continued to prosper. He married and had a son, and the boy grew to be a fine little chap of five years of age. One day he was missing, suddenly, mysteriously missing, and could not be found. Search brought only one thing to light, a scrap of paper on which was pen-printed the one word, 'Vengeance.'

"This reminded us at once of Furniss and his threats, but, search as we would everywhere, not a trace of him could be found, and the child was never seen again. That was ten years ago. My son and his wife nearly grieved themselves to death over the loss of their boy—in fact, the wife died a year ago, after nine years of hopeless hoping, of a broken heart. My son has never smiled from that moment, and is more bitter than ever against the man who thus wrecked his life's happiness and more than ever determined to wreak vengeance upon him. Learning that Deadwood Dick was in the city, he sought an interview with him, and that noble-hearted man, when he had heard the story, gave my son his hand and promise that he would aid him anew in the search for his lost child. They have gone to a place called Devil's Delight, a lone camp afar off in the mountains, where only His Majesty would think of dwelling, from where chance rumor brought to my son's ears the information of a man answering somewhat to the description of Furniss, and where, at any rate, Deadwood Dick hopes to get some definite knowledge concerning this nest of bandits in whom you have interest."

Barely had the old man ceased speaking when the door of the office opened and a letter was placed in his hand.

CHAPTER III.

THE COOL VISITOR.

Old Mr. Bamford looked at the letter in somewhat of wonderment.

The envelope was wrinkled and much soiled, and it bore no stamp or postmark of any kind.

"See here," he called to the clerk who had given it to him. "Where did you get this letter? Who brought it here so dirty and wrinkled as this?"

"It was found on the counter, sir," the clerk answered. "No one seems to know how it came there. You see, it is marked important, sir, so I brought it to you without delay."

"That will do."

The clerk withdrew, and Mr. Bamford opened the letter.

"I cannot imagine who it can be from," he remarked, while doing so. "It certainly is not my son's hand— Good Heavens!"

"What is it, sir?" asked the visitor.

"It is from the Flock of Forty, demanding a ransom for my son's release, Mr. Hedgeworth."

"Can it be possible? Then what are we to understand? If he is a prisoner, perhaps Deadwood Dick has been killed, and in that event my hope in that direction is blasted."

"I fear the worst," the old gentleman sighed.

"May I read the letter?"

"Yes."

The young man took the soiled missive and read:

"Sigmund Bamford, Sr.: If you want your son to return to you, it will cost you twenty-five thousand dollars in gold to buy his life and liberty. We give you one day (24 hours) to decide. If you will pay, hang a white cloth in your store window; if you refuse, a red one. This must be done not later than noon to-morrow."

"THE FLOCK OF FORTY."

"What do you think of it?" asked the old man.

"It seems to mean business," answered the younger one.

"And what am I to do?"

"There is only one thing you can do that I can see, sir."

"And what is that?"

"Hang the white cloth in your window, as indicated. You must save his life at any cost."

"Yes, yes, there is no getting around that. It will delay their taking his life, if they mean to do that, and the way for his rescue may open while the negotiations are in progress."

"There is no other way. And, it seems that your cause and mine are now identical, save that I seek to rescue my father, while you are concerned for your son. Mr. Bamford, we must put our heads together and outwit these devils. How are we going to do it?"

"Alas, I do not know."

"This letter gives us no information whatever; it gives us no chance to circumvent them."

"No; I can do nothing but put the cloth in the window, as indicated, and see what will follow that. The next move may give us something more to work upon than we have now."

"You are right; there is no other way."

"And I will do it at once."

The old man rose and left the office, and a few minutes later a clerk in the establishment was busy in removing everything of a red color from the windows and rearranging them with articles in white.

About the time the old gentleman returned there came a messenger from the hotel with a letter for young Hedgeworth.

"For me?" the young man exclaimed.

"Yes," said the messenger. "It is marked important, and the proprietor hurried me off with it to find you."

Hedgeworth thanked the man, promising him a better reward as soon as he could give it, and opened the envelope immediately. It was in kind and appearance like the one Mr. Bamford had received.

"Ha! Hear this!" he exclaimed, and he read aloud:

"Samuel Hedgeworth, Jr.: The price of your father's life and liberty will be two

hundred and fifty thousand dollars. That is the figure, and you are given twenty-four hours in which to decide whether you will pay it or not. If you will pay, show a white handkerchief in the breast-pocket of your coat; if not, a red one. Must be seen not later than noon to-morrow.

"THE FLOCK OF FORTY."

"They have an agent here in the city," said Mr. Bamford.

"Not to be doubted, sir."

"And we must deal with him."

"Exactly; but it is not likely that we will have a chance to talk with him."

"You think not?"

"It is not likely, I say, and yet I may be mistaken in that. However, that remains to be seen. The first thing to be done is to signify willingness to meet their demands."

"We should have an interview, if possible. I do not see how it can be arranged in any other manner. Of course, if it comes to the pinch, I will pay the sum and ask no questions, in order to get my son out of their hands. How is it with you?"

Young Hedgeworth was thoughtful.

"It is plain that my father has refused their demands," he said. "I am scarcely worth more than the sum they require. And I am sure that my father would be opposed to giving them one penny. Still, what am I to do? They limit the time so that there is no opportunity given for organized attack and rescue, even if that could be accomplished."

"The argument is all on their side."

There came a tap at the door. Mr. Bamford opened it, and found a man of rather gentlemanly appearance.

"Mr. Bamford?" he inquired.

"At your service, sir," said the old gentleman.

"Ah! I was not aware that you had company here, Mr. Bamford. However, I am glad that you have."

The man had entered while speaking, in a gentle, catlike manner, and now he closed the door and helped himself to a chair, Mr. Bamford looking at him in amazement.

"Who are you, sir?" the old man asked.

"A man you probably desire to see, sir," was the suave response. "I note that you have displayed white in your windows already. And what about the color of handkerchief you intend to show, Mr. Hedgeworth?" turning to him with a pleasing smile.

"There can be but one answer," said Hedgeworth, and he exposed a corner of white from his breast pocket.

"You have taken the wise course, if you value your father's life," the man coolly remarked. "Before we go any farther, let me give you a word of caution: If you attempt to deal doubly with me, the worse for you, for I am not alone. Be sensible, and treat me like a gentleman. Should I be arrested, your lives would not be worth a cent."

"What is the scheme?" asked young Hedgeworth. "In what manner is the money to be paid and the captives turned over to us?"

"Give me your attention. In the first place, nothing but gold will be taken in exchange. You must fulfill your part, and then trust to the honor of the Flock of Forty to perform theirs. The gold delivered, the prisoners will be set at liberty at a certain specified time and started upon the right trail to meet you, or whomever you may delegate, and the business will be ended to the satisfaction of all concerned."

"But the sum you ask of me is out of reason," said Hedgeworth.

"For a millionaire? Oh, no!"

"But my father is the millionaire, not I! He may be willing to pay the sum, but it

is impossible for me to do so. I suppose you will allow me time to communicate with him?"

"Have you the nerve, sir, to go and see him personally? We have anticipated some such objection as this, owing to the amount demanded. If so, Mr. Bamford will no doubt intrust to you the sum necessary to buy his son's release, and you may accompany me."

"What assurance have I that I will not be made a prisoner myself?"

"My word, sir. It is all I can give you."

"Well, I will go."

"Enough said. Remember the cautions I have given. To-morrow morning, then, at daylight, you will set out alone in the direction of Lejano, carrying with you the twenty-five thousand dollars in gold for the ransom of Mr. Bamford the younger. It is needless to talk farther. Gentlemen, adois."

The polite stranger rose, bowed, and left the room, walked leisurely out of the store and mingled with the people on the street, and was seen no more.

CHAPTER IV.

A SPECTRAL COFFIN.

Devil's Delight, the camp was called, and the name was, perhaps, not inappropriate. In point of wickedness it was a place well calculated to delight his satanic majesty.

Almost beyond the pale of civilization, if not indeed quite so, away in the mountain fastnesses, afar from railroads or any important trail, it was a law unto itself to all intents and purposes. That law, it might be said, was not a great many degrees removed from outlawry, at best.

It is to this place that the reader's attention is for a little while invited.

The usual evening crowd was in the Hang-up Hotel, the leading place of the kind in the camp, and about as "hard" a hole as one would care to enter, and the usual amusements were being pursued.

Without was darkness, the sky being overcast with somber, scurrying clouds, and there was every indication of a coming storm. The wind was whistling dismally down the chimney of the hotel, and for that matter through many a crack and cranny throughout the whole building.

Of a sudden the door opened and a man plunged into the room, almost falling on the floor, so great his haste. His face was blanched; his eyes were all but bulging from their sockets, and he presented every appearance of the most abject fear. He was a man of middle age, an unkempt, ragged, forlorn-looking specimen, wearing one boot and one shoe, and having no hat.

"Tony Bly," was the exclamation his sudden appearance called forth.

"Phwat the divil ails ye, Tony?" inquired Dick Kelly, the proprietor of the hotel, from behind the bar.

"Have you seen a ghost, fool?" demanded John Garrat, the mayor of the camp, a man who, while mayor in name, was more than mayor in fact, and who ruled his people as with a rod of iron.

"Oh! most noble khan, illustrious caliph!" the terrified man cried out, cringing before the ruler of the camp with base servility, "I am doomed! I am doomed! I have just seen my coffin ride by in a chariot of fire on the wings of night! Kelly, for the love of humanity, give me—"

"Not a drap!" exclaimed the proprietor of the shebang, cutting the man off short. "Oi know ye, Tony Bly, and divil a bit can ye work a dhrink out av me wi'd a shitory loike dhat!"

"But it is true, it is true!" cried the disreputable-looking fellow. "Believe me, incomparable sovereign!" turning again to the czar of the camp.

"Stop your fool lingo and tell me just what you have seen," thundered Garrat.

"Oh! grand bashaw, it was a phantom coffin!"

"Begorra, it is dhe royal liar ye are, Tony Bly," spoke up one Mike McTool, better known as Merry Mike.

"I speak the truth, the truth only!" cried the tattered wretch, standing erect and striking himself a blow on the breast theatrically. "Do you think I would come here with such a lie?"

"Ye would do anything fur a dhrink," declared Kelly.

Everybody was interested now, and all within the room were upon their feet.

At that instant another person bounded into the room, excited like the first, but not so badly frightened, apparently. This time it was a boy, short of stature, but chunky in build.

"Come out here, all you galoots!" he shouted. "Come and see this thing up in the sky! If it isn't a coffin, then you kin take my shirt for a dish-clout! No time to fool, for it may be gone in a minute! Hustle, ef you want to see it while it is in bloom!"

There was a rush for the door instantly, the men piling pell-mell over the chairs and tables in their haste to get out. The bearer of the news this time was a boy named Billy Downs, a lad about fifteen years of age, and better known as Little Billy. If Little Billy said it was so, there was no doubting it, and everybody was eager to get a glimpse of the thing, whatever it might be.

Out they tumbled, as described, the mayor included, and not even the proprietor of the place excepted, every soul of them save alone the disreputable-looking Tony Bly, and he, as soon as the last man had left the room, placed one forefinger alongside his nose, slowly winked one eye, and immediately turned his attention to the bar. Laying his hands on it, he sprang up, caught across it on his stomach, and, reaching out, deftly removed one of the bottles from the shelf.

Getting down quickly, he as quickly concealed the bottle somewhere under his ragged raiment, and hastened out after the crowd.

Meantime, everybody was looking skyward.

There, high up above the camp, aglow in outline against the dark cloud background, was the figure of a coffin!

It was not to be mistaken, for its outlines were too clearly defined. A coffin it was—a coffin of light, and it was floating slowly and steadily up and away, unmoved by the fierce and fitful gusts of wind.

"Do you see it?" called out Tony Bly. "Am I a liar now, boys? When I saw it first I could almost lay my hand on it, so low down it was, and the shock almost sent me into a fit. What does it mean? Most worthy sachem," appealing to the mayor, "does it mean that I am a doomed mortal?"

"Hang me if I know what it means!" said Garrat, hoarsely.

"Sure, Oi never seen anyting loike it in all me loife before, no more Oi did," declared Merry Mike.

"Dhe same wi'd me," averred Dick Kelly. "Oi w'u'd loike to be knowin' dhe m'anin' av it, so Oi would. Phwat divil's own banshee can it be, I wondher."

"Whatever it is, I must have something to steady my nerves, after the shock I have had," remarked Tony Bly. "Most honored regent," to the mayor, with a bow of base humility, "may I look to you as my good Samaritan?"

"No, sir," was the emphatic response.

"Alas! alas! To receive a shock like that, and not be able to apply the antidote! Dick Kelly, I suppose—"

"Niver a dhrap!" the proprietor of the Hang-up Hotel cut him short. "Yure nerves are no betther nor any other man's nerves, aven av ye do boast havin' a col-legt eddycashun, begob!"

Tony, according to his own story, had been something or other of a professor in a college at one time of his life.

"Alas! alas! alas!" he sighed, as he turned sadly away. "Truly, my lines have not fallen in pleasant places in my declining days. I must hie me to the solitudes and mourn." And he shuffled away, hugging closely the bottle he had purloined.

A little later, had any one seen him with the bottle to his lips and his head thrown back, it might have been thought that he was sweeping the night skies with a telescope in search of further spectral coffins.

Meanwhile, the strange apparition had floated away and away, until at last it had disappeared entirely from sight.

Numerous the comments that had been made concerning it.

"Well, it is gone, whatever it was," observed the mayor of the camp, leading the way back again into the saloon.

"And loikewise so has Tony Bly," observed Dick Kelly. "It is a wondher dhat he didn't hang around longer in hopes av a swill. Oi never knowed him to let up so 'azy in me loife before."

"If you want him, I can soon bring him here," suggested the mayor, with a wink around. And then in louder voice: "Come, boys, let's take something to the mysterious thing we have just seen in the sky! Come along, one and all, and crook elbows to the specter coffin!"

The boys ranged to the bar in no time, standing three or four deep in rows, but the call did not bring the result expected.

"Dhe deuce!" suddenly exclaimed Kelly. "Me biggest bottle is gone, so it is!"

"Dhat accounts fur it," assumed Merry Mike.

"Phwat d'ye m'ane, Mike?" Kelly demanded.

"Oi m'ane dhat Tony must have helped himsel', dhe while we wur' out viewin' dhe coffin."

"Begorra, av Oi knowed dhat to be thrue Oi would murther him dhe next toime he puts his nose in me dhure, so Oi would!" the angered Kelly declared.

"If the bottle is gone, and Tony is not here to respond to a treat," assured Garrat, "that is proof almost conclusive, I take it. But you have plenty more, Dick; hand up another bottle."

The insufferable stuff was set out, and the crowd proceeded to do ample justice to the mayor's generosity.

While they were drinking, the rapid rat-a-tat! rat-a-tat! of horses' hoofs resounded without, near at hand, and in the next moment there came a ringing "Whoa!"

Some one within threw open the door, when, to the surprise of all present, two horsemen rode into the saloon, the combined weight of their animals causing the frail structure to rock to its very foundation. Good-looking, fearless-looking men they were, particularly the one clad in semi-Mexican garb, the younger of the two.

Every eye in the room turned upon them questioningly.

Who were they?

CHAPTER V.

A DARING FEAT.

The appearance of these two horsemen, as mentioned, was a surprise to everybody.

Not that horsemen were unusual, but for mounted men to ride into the bar-room, of the Hang-up Hotel was new and novel. It was not unheard-of, as a feat, but it had never been performed there.

"Whoa!" cried the riders again, when

they had ridden straight up to the bar. "Is this the place called Devil's Delight, citizens?"

"That's what it is," answered Garrat, the mayor, from where he stood, in a cold way.

"But divil's dhe deloight it will be fur yuse av ye don't git dhem horses out av me place instanter!" cried out the proprietor of the shebang. "Phwat do yez m'ane, anyhow, by dhrivin' yure bastes in here?"

"There, now, Irishman, do not let your temper rise," admonished the one described as wearing semi-Mexican garb. "Should think you would be glad for a little sensation once in a while to stir up your blood, living away up here in the hills. Set 'em up for the boys at my expense."

As he said so he tossed a gold coin upon the bar, and the crowd pressed forward, the horsemen backing away to make room for them.

"Who are you, strangers?" demanded the mayor.

"Is it necessary to ask me that?" queried the one who had been the first to speak.

"Why not?" the mayor asked.

"There should be some one here who knows me, I think. I am known to a good many people in Chihuahua—people who have dealt with me in Chihuahua city."

"Sig Bamford," some one exclaimed.

"At your service, citizens," was the acknowledgment. "It would have been useless for me to try to pass under an assumed name here, I knew, even had there been occasion for it. I am too well known. Yes, I am Sigmund Bamford, of Chihuahua, gentlemen, and now, let me introduce my friend, Mr. Paul Harris, from the other side of the Rio Grande."

The other bowed to the assembly.

"And what are you doing here?" inquired the mayor.

"Well, now you are touching on private matters," returned Bamford. "Who and what are you, sir?"

"I am John Garrat, mayor and boss of this camp. I make it my business to know other men's business, when a stranger drops into town. We are a people to ourselves up here."

"So I have heard, Mr. Garrat. Well, sir, considering that you are the mayor of the camp, and have a certain degree of authority, or ought to have, I will answer your question. I have come here for the purpose of starting my friend in business, if your camp suits him."

"That's your idea, eh?"

"That is it."

"And what business, if I may ask that?"

"Why, something after the pattern of my own in Chihuahua, only on a smaller scale, of necessity."

"Well, we will see about that later, Mr. Bamford. It will be as I say. If I decide against you, my decision must be final."

With that, and a wave of the hand, the mayor left the room.

The two horsemen looked at each other.

"What kind of a place have we got into?" questioned the one introduced as Paul Harris. "Is this free Mexico, or have we been suddenly transferred over into Russia?"

"The man seemed to mean business," answered Bamford. "But I do not look for any opposition to our honest project. Here, boys, take another drink, this time at my expense," and he tossed a coin to the proprietor as the other had done. "You look like a white lot, anyhow."

"And ye can bet yure loife dhat we are, too, dhat same," declared Merry Mike. "Lasteways, Oi know of wan dhat is—mesel'."

"Whur' is that boy Billy?" at that in-

stant demanded a high-keyed voice at the door.

All looked at the inquirer.

"Come in, Injun Inez; come roight in," invited Merry Mike. "Here is a trate on foot, an' you don't want to miss it."

"I want that boy Billy, that's what I want," was the snarl. "Have ye seen anything of him? Have ye seen anything of Sonora Sam? Has ther boy been around here?"

"Begorra, whin d'ye think Little Billy will ever be big enough to take care av himsel', Injun Inez?" demanded Dick Kelly. "Any wan would t'ink he was nothin' but a babby, dhe way ye kape him tied to yure apron-sthring, or thry to. Billy is big enough to take care av himsel'."

"Have ye seen him?" the woman demanded.

She was a hideous-looking creature, old, toothless, greasy, with a complexion like rust and a skin resembling in modified form that of the rhinoceros.

"Yes, he was here only a spell ago," somebody answered. "Didn't notice which way he went, Injun Inez."

"Ye had better partake av dhe trate," reminded Merry Mike.

"Have ye seen Sonora Sam?" the creature asked again.

"Sonora Sam is away," Kelly informed her.

At that information the woman's anxiety seemed to vanish at once, and she advanced to the bar, throwing away a huge quid of tobacco as she did so, and taking the bottle, she poured herself out a good, stiff horn.

"Whose treat is it?" she asked, lifting the glass.

"Mine, madam," spoke Bamford.

The strangers had been taking in the little episode in an amused way.

Injun Inez had to turn to see the speaker, and the moment she caught sight of his face she gave a start, leaning forward and peering at him keenly from under her overhanging brows.

"You here?" she exclaimed.

It was Bamford's turn to show surprise. "You know me, then?" he demanded. "I cannot recall your face."

"Begorra, it is plain enough dhat ye never seen it before in yure loife, dhen," put in Merry Mike.

"Yes, I know you," said the woman, paying no heed to the as.de remark. "I know you, Sigmund Bamford, and here is to your health, and the success of whatever has brought you here."

She put the brimming glass to her lips and drained it to the last drop, not so much as winking as the fiery poison burned her throat.

"Thanks for your good wishes, woman," said Bamford. "Now, who are you?"

"Oh! I am Injun Inez, that's all; ha! ha! ha!"

She turned to go.

"Hould on!" Kelly called out. "Have ye seen Tony Bly dhe night?"

For answer to that, the disgusting-looking creature picked up a stone that lay on the floor used to hold the door open, and threw it with force at Kelly's head.

"I'll give ye Tony Bly!" she screamed. "I'll give ye Tony Bly! Ever ye mention his name to me again, Dick Kelly, and see if I don't come around and talk to ye with a gun! Tony Bly! As if I would stoop to notice him!"

With that, and shaking her fists in the direction of the bar, she drew her greasy shawl close around her head and hurried out, leaving the crowd roaring with laughter at Dick Kelly's expense. He, by the way, had had to duck his head lively to escape.

"Maybe ye will have better sinse another toime," suggested Merry Mike.

"Begorra, Oi didn't t'ink she would go off dhat way," Kelly declared, as he surveyed the havoc the stone had wrought. "Well, it was me own fault, anyhow," he added.

"Well, landlord, what about lodging?" asked Bamford, but before answer could be made to that the door was thrown open and a score of masked men rushed in.

Their appearance was sudden, and before their intention could be guessed it was made known in an unmistakable way.

With guns drawn, they covered the two horsemen, and came the ringing order:

"Hands up!"

"What is the meaning of this?" cried the younger of the two strangers, he called Harris.

"It means, Deadwood Dick, that you are our pot-roast!" was the answer promptly given. "And that you, Sigmund Bamford, are the honored guest of the Flock of Forty!"

Without a word the younger man threw himself upon the neck of his horse, the animal leaped forward at the same instant, trampling three or four of the masked men under its iron hoofs, and, with a couple of bounds that threatened the demolition of the shanty hotel, leaped fairly and squarely through the nearest window, carrying away the frail sash as if it had been so much paper!

CHAPTER VI. IN DURANCE.

So unexpected, so entirely unlooked for, that not a shot was fired after him.

His companion, had he possessed the same amount of dare-devil nerve in his make-up, might have escaped unscathed had he acted promptly in following, but he allowed the propitious moment to pass.

The reaction was prompt, and some of the masked men sprang to the damaged window, sending shots ringing out upon the night winds, but to no purpose. The others seized Bamford's horse, covering Bamford with their guns at close range, while yet others covered the crowd.

The crowd stood spellbound with amazement.

It had, seemingly, been a double thunder-clap for them—to learn that one of the two men was the noted Deadwood Dick, and that these others were a part of the Flock of Forty!

"Hands up! every mother's son of you!" the masked leader ordered. "If a single one of you attempts to draw a gun it will be his death signal instantly, I give you fair warning! You, Sigmund Bamford, are my prisoner, and it will cost you just twenty-five thousand to buy your release!"

"I did not know that Devil's Delight was a den of thieves," said the prisoner, bitterly.

"Nor is it, begob!" cried out Dick Kelly, who stood behind his bar with his hands lifted high. "Have dhey not said dhey are dhe Flock of Forty?"

"And this seems to be their headquarters," said Bamford.

"You will find out differently, before we get done with you," grated the leader of the band. "Men, bind this fellow, and we will presently show him where our headquarters is."

Two or three of them quickly bound the captured man to his horse, the rest meantime controlling the crowd.

"Now, boys, for a drink before we go," said the leader.

"Begorra, av dhat is all ye want ye may have it and welcome," declared the proprietor.

"That is all we will trouble you for this time, sir," was the return. "We can't bother with small fry like you when we have got such a big fish already in the pan."

Kelly handed out a bottle, and it was passed from hand to hand, each man taking a portion when the bottle came to him, and passing it on, all the others keeping the crowd well covered with their guns while one was drinking.

A few had gone out in search of the man who had escaped them, but he was not to be seen anywhere, as they now returned and reported.

"He is not likely to come again immediately," said the leader of the gang.

"He will, if it was Deadwood Dick," said another. "He does not know what it means to give up. But, come, boys, we must away."

"Hould on wan minnit," spoke up the proprietor of the place. "Is it a sure enough fact, begorra, dhat thot nerry gosssoon was dhe noted Deadwood Dick we have all heard so much about?"

"It was nobody else, Irishman," the leader of the band assured. "But his name is likely to be Dickwood Dead before he gets out of these hills, if the Flock of Forty can get in a lick at him. You can set this down as the red letter night of Devil's Delight, citizens."

"Begorra, it is havin' dhat shattered windy put up here behind me bar Oi'll be," declared the proprietor, "and Oi'll have a big placard put on it, 'Dhis is dhe windy dhat Deadwood Dick jumped through, horse and all!' Sure, it will dhraw a crowd to me place. Good-night to yez, Flock of Forty; and to you, Mither Bamford. Sorry dhat we can't help ye out av yure fix."

Four of the masked fellows—most of them were Mexicans, judging them by their dress, led the prisoner from the room, two on each side of the horse, and the others backed out, still covering the crowd.

Outside it had continued to grow darker, and the coming storm seemed imminent. The outlines of horses were just discernible in the light that came from the open doors and windows.

The fellows mounted, with warnings to the crowd not to try a shot at them unless they wanted their camp laid in ashes, and at the word from their leader were off.

No shot was fired, and ere long the clatter of their horses' hoofs was lost to hearing. The wind whistled higher, a dash of rain ushered in the storm, and the citizens of Devil's Delight crowded back into the hotel to discuss the latest sensation.

Devil's Delight was in a gulch between two towering peaks.

The way to the south sloped downward gradually, in zigzag fashion, and finally terminated upon the tablelands, though the trail by no means ended there.

Continuing on, the trail eventually merged into the old highway which has elsewhere received mention, but at a point where nothing but rock existed, and where its branching was scarcely discoverable.

The way to the north was different. It led up and up, in similar zigzag manner, and its termination was an ancient Aztec temple.

And there, to all appearances, the trail ended; nowhere else was discoverable any pathway by which descent from the rugged height could be made. And that temple was the lair of the Flock of Forty.

It may be more fully described further along.

The horsemen with their prisoner, setting out from Devil's Delight as described, headed northward.

As they advanced the trail narrowed, until no more than two, or at the most three, could ride abreast, and the wind, at their backs, whirled past them with velocity.

A mile they had gone, it may have been, when of a sudden there came the stern challenge in Spanish:

"Halt! Who comes?"

"Twenty-two of forty, with a prisoner," was the response.

"Who in command?"

"Second in authority."

"Give the countersign, Second."

A word was spoken in a low tone, and they were permitted to pass on up the narrow gulch without further hinderance.

What the hinderance would have been had the response to the challenge not been satisfactory needs not be mentioned just here. They rode on, closely folded in their cloaks.

It was too dark for them to see or be seen of one another, save in outline the most vague, but every one seemed to know well the trail, and even had they not known it, they were in such close file that none could go astray if the leader went aright.

Thus for a long distance, and presently the chieftain of the party called out:

"Single file!"

There was immediately a stopping, holding back, and falling into line on the part of the twenty and odd riders, some swearing roundly in choice Spanish as they jostled roughly against others, but finally all were in line, and they proceeded in that manner.

The reason for this order was presently apparent to the prisoner, for they rode into a narrow defile where his feet and knees struck occasionally both sides of the pass at the same time.

Presently, somewhere overhead, a sharp gong sounded. A moment, and it sounded again. And then again.

So it continued as each rider passed a given point, until it had been heard twenty-four times, and with the twenty-fourth stroke an ejaculation as of surprise was heard from the head of the line.

The signal bell had recorded the twenty-two members of the band, and their prisoner, and yet the gong had sounded forth once again!

Who was the extra horseman?

There was some whispered comment between members of the band, when they came where they could ride in pairs and threes again, but no comment was made aloud.

They pressed on, and at last a light gleamed ahead, and ere long they entered the open end of the old temple mentioned. The whole interior was dimly alight with the reflection from a fire that blazed in a distant corner, giving it a weird aspect.

The leader of the party had halted near the entrance, and when the last man had passed him, called out:

"Guard well the pass! There is a spy among us, and his life shall be the forfeit! Members of the Flock of Forty, give me the sign of your loyalty to our flock!"

CHAPTER VII. DICK ON DECK.

It was, as said, a weird place.

On two sides rose the heavy walls of the temple, and down the center stood a row of massive pillars, some broken, others crumbling to their fall, all standing as grim sentinels of a forgotten past.

In the far end blazed the fire, and over that portion a rude roof had been extemporized. There figures were seen moving about in the light, and some came forward toward the entrance, the rain having for a few moments almost ceased. It was evident that something was amiss.

At the word of command from their captain the members of the band made haste to form in line.

The prisoner was thus left standing alone.

It was but the work of a moment for them to arrange in line, and as their leader

ran his eyes along the line he uttered an exclamation.

There were only twenty-one of them, himself making the twenty-second, and the prisoner the twenty-third; where was the twenty-fourth? If twenty-four had passed the gong, where was the missing man?

Meantime the men had saluted in a peculiar manner.

"But where is the other?" the captain demanded.

"What other?" one asked.

"The gong recorded twenty-four horses passing."

"That is so, but it must have been a mistake, for we are all here, you see."

"No, you are not all there, for the gong does not make mistakes of that kind. Get torches, quick as you can, and we'll make a search!"

All was bustle in a moment.

"What is the matter?" asked a man just then reaching them from the place where the fire burned.

The situation was explained to him briefly and quickly, and at once he gave orders for the distant guard to be notified by telephone to let no one pass out.

It seemed they were well provided for emergencies like the present.

"Who can it be?" asked that man, then, of the leader who had come in command of the horsemen.

"I believe it was Deadwood Dick, Jr., the famous American detective," was the response. "He was in Devil's Delight tonight, and escaped us there."

"Escaped from the Flock? How?"

It was briefly but pointedly related.

"A man to be feared, indeed," said the man who had come forward. "He must be retaken, if possible."

The prisoner was taken from the horse now by others who had come up, and was led forward to the corner where the fire blazed, where a good look was taken at him.

"So, you are Sigmund Bamford, are you?" was demanded by the man who appeared to be the chief in authority.

"That is my name," was stiffly answered. "To whom have I the honor of speaking?" with much stress upon the word "honor."

"You are addressing the commander-in-chief of the Flock of Forty," was the response. "Not only so, but you are face to face with one who once swore to have revenge upon you."

The prisoner started.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"I am Franklin Furniss!"

"Good Heavens! You dare to make this known to me? Then you intend—"

"That you shall never escape with your life—exactly! I have not forgotten the past, even though you have not heard from me. But, wait; we will talk of this later."

With a word of direction to a couple of fellows near, he hastened away again, and the prisoner was hustled through a secret door into an apartment that was hewn out of the solid rock on the east side of the temple at that point, where he was chained.

Torches were by this time moving hither and thither, but were gradually congregating near the main entrance, and it was to that point the chief of the brigands returned.

The rain had now ceased entirely, though it threatened to resume with redoubled force at any moment.

"Have you found anything?" the chief asked, of his second in command.

"Not a thing yet. No tracks have turned off."

He referred to the ground just outside the open end of the temple, having looked no further.

Now, however, numerous torches were on hand, and the mounted men were ordered to hasten back along the narrow pass and make a thorough search of every possible place of concealment.

They started, the second in command leading them, and they had not gone a great distance when they came to where a riderless horse was standing, and it was recognized at sight as the animal that had leaped through the saloon window only a little earlier in the night.

The horse was a coal black, and not easily to be mistaken.

"Where is the rider?" cried the leader.

"That's the question," the response.

This, as nearly all else quoted in the present chapter, was in Spanish, the language of the country.

A little further search brought to light another discovery, which caused even more excitement than the first had created. This was the body of a man lying close to the side of the pass.

"Ha! Here he is!" was exclaimed.

The man waved his torch, and the others hastened to where he stood, all having dismounted.

"Is he dead?" was eagerly asked.

"Zounds! It is not he!"

"Who, then?"

"One of our own! It is Juan Zarcillo!"

"Then the hound has killed him! Sacre! But he shall pay for it with his life!"

"No, no! He is not dead! See! he breathes! He has been hit on the head, that is all. But he has lost his hat and his casaca— He was with us at the temple!"

"So he was! We have been tricked! Two of you bring Juan; the rest of you follow me!"

So saying, the leader ran to his horse, vaulted into the saddle, and led the way at a tearing pace back to the ruined temple.

"Juan Zarcillo!" he shouted. "Where is he? Do not let him escape!"

But he was too late.

When the two fellows opened again the secret door in the wall, after having secured their prisoner, they looked into the tubes of a pair of glittering guns.

"Back!" ordered a stern voice, in Spanish. "Make a sound, and I will give you pills that will quiet your nerves! Back! and close the door—or, I can attend to that; you fasten it."

"Juan!" they both ejaculated, as they fell back.

They recognized the coat, and took the man to be the fellow Zarcillo.

"Fall back!" was ordered again, and the whisper was so fierce and the guns so threatening that they obeyed.

The supposed Zarcillo followed them, closing the door with his back as soon as within, and then immediately ordering the two fellows to secure it under penalty of death if they refused.

By this time they had recognized their mistake; this was the man for whom the others were looking.

"It will be our death if we obey, senior," they said.

"It will be death if you don't," was the grim declaration. "I give you two seconds to make up your minds."

There was a dim light in the place, from a lamp hanging from the ceiling, and by it the two fellows saw the glittering eyes of the man before them, and they trembled, knowing who he was.

"Spare us," said one. "I will obey you."

Quickly he sprang to the door, and as quickly turned a stone that effectually fastened it.

"There, senior," he said, "they cannot get in very easily. I have obeyed you; you must save my life."

"No time to talk of that," cried Dick, for, of course, it was the dauntless Rich-

ard. "Release this prisoner, and if there is any other way out of here, show it to us instantly. No talk! Act!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A TEST OF NERVE.

The redoubtable Richard had thrown aside the clumsy Mexican garment he had taken from the fellow Zarcillo, as well as the hat, which he had put on over his own.

No uncommon thing, by the way, to see a Mexican wearing two hats at the same time, and in some instances three. A hat in good condition is almost legal tender in that land of peculiar people. Hence, even had it been noticed, it would not have been suspicious.

"Thank God! it is you!" said Sigmund Bamford, fervently, in English.

"Do you think I would save myself and leave you in their hands if I could possibly help it?" Dick demanded.

"And thank God I hear my own language once more!" exclaimed another voice, coming from a distant part of the chamber, on the other side of a wide opening. "Get me out of here, too, if you can, sir."

"Who are you?" asked Dick.

"My name is Hedgeworth. I have been imprisoned here to be held for ransom."

"We'll do it if possible," averred Dick. "We may have to fight our way out, but the more the merrier, of the right sort. Three will be better than two, in a scrimmage."

"Who are you?" Hedgeworth inquired.

"I am known as Deadwood Dick, Junior."

"Thank God, again! Have you, then, seen my son?"

"No, I have seen no one. There is no time to talk now. Release that other, too, you fellows."

The two members of the band had by this time set Bamford at liberty, and at the order they hastened through the open to where the other prisoner was confined in like manner.

Dick followed them closely.

The moment he passed the portal of the alcove opening that separated the two chambers a pistol flashed almost in his face, and the report almost deafened him.

One of the fellows had turned the instant he stepped into the shadow, and had made an attempt on Dick's life.

"Fool! take that!" the other Mexican hissed, and he drove his knife to the hilt in his comrade's back. "If you had killed him it would have signaled your death, anyhow."

The man dropped to the floor without a cry, literally pierced through the heart by the keen weapon.

"That was well done," applauded Dick, as coolly as if no attempt had been made upon his life.

"I did it to show you that I am in earnest," assured the other, wiping his knife-blade on his leg.

"All the same, I must now relieve you of your weapons," announced Dick. "I do not care to take any further risk."

"On my honor, senior, I mean you fair."

"I believe you do," admitted Dick, "but it is a risk to trust to the word of one of the Forty. I have no doubt that to be the slayer or the capturer of Deadwood Dick would mean your promotion. I will let you further prove yourself before I put my life in your hands. You are a Mexican."

"And all Mexicans are not bad, senior."

"There are so many bad ones that it brands the whole herd, nevertheless. But come, release this man."

"If I can do it, senior."

Dick had relieved the fellow of his weapons, handing them to Bamford, who in turn took also those belonging to the dead

Mexican, and thus they were given ample means of defense.

The Mexican tried to remove the chains that held Mr. Hedgeworth secured to a ring in the wall.

"I cannot do it, senor," he declared.

"You must do it!" cried the prisoner. "I must make my escape from this horrible hole."

"What is the trouble?" demanded Dick.

"He is doubly locked, and I have no key to fit the locks."

"Who has the keys?"

"The chief has one, the lieutenant the other. He is a valuable prisoner, senor."

"Break them! File them!" urged Mr. Hedgeworth. "Anyhow to get me out of here! If you are indeed Deadwood Dick you can find a way, sir," he added, as an extra appeal.

"I am not infallible, sir," protested Dick.

"You are near enough to it for the purpose. I am not so young as you, but I can still fight, and you will need my aid. It is a mutual interest."

"We will not leave you if it is possible to free you, sir," Dick promised, and he examined the chains.

"Hist!" warned the Mexican.

"What is it?" Dick asked.

"I hear the horsemen returning at a gallop."

"Then the trouble will soon begin, I expect. Can they get in here?"

"No; not until they break down the door."

"And you know a way out?"

"Si, senor."

"That is enough for our purpose then. I do not know about getting you out of these chains, Mr. Hedgeworth; they were made to hold."

The tread of hoofs was now plainly heard by all, and in another moment voices were heard on the other side of the wall, faintly; then came a pounding.

"Open this door to us!" was shouted.

"There is no time to lose," whispered the Mexican to Dick. "We must, indeed, run, or they can shut us off!"

"Do not leave me!" pleaded Mr. Hedgeworth, almost piteously. "It will mean my death in this terrible dungeon, if you do not release me now and let me go with you. Is there not some way?"

"Will you take a risk?" asked Dick.

"Anything!"

"I will try a shot or two at these locks, and possibly I can spring them open with a bullet."

Mr. Hedgeworth paled at the thought, but said:

"You know what you can do, sir; direct me what I must do, and go ahead with the experiment."

"Very well! Turn yourself sidewise and hold the lock against the wall with your hand. I can hit the lock; the only danger is that the bullet may glance, and you must take the risk of that."

Mr. Hedgeworth promptly obeyed the directions.

"Bring that lamp in here," Dick directed Bamford. "We shall need it anyhow, I doubt not."

The lamp was brought in haste, and as soon as its rays fell upon the prisoner Dick's weapon spoke, and a heavy bullet crushed in the face of the lock. It had been a snap shot.

"Will it open?" Dick inquired.

The Mexican sprang to ascertain.

"Not quite, senor," he reported.

"Turn it the other way, then," ordered Dick.

This was done, and even before the Mexican could step aside the revolver spoke again.

The bullet this time shattered the lock, and it dropped open, when it required but the slightest effort to remove the chain,

and, in that far, released the man it confined.

Meanwhile there was shouting without, and furious pounding against the door of stone.

"This other chain now, and I am free!" cried Mr. Hedgeworth.

He indicated the one around his neck.

"Dare you take the risk?" again asked Dick. "The lock is close to your throat, sir."

"No matter; your aim is unerring, and I am not afraid," responded the prisoner. "You can stand so that if the ball does glance it will be likely to glance from instead of toward me."

"I admire your nerve, sir," added Dick. "It is a pleasure to meet a man of your caliber, and it will be a satisfaction to fight my way out of this den in company with you. Here, Mexican, I'll try your nerve at the same time. Take a stone and hold it behind the lock and against the wall, and the lock against it."

"Si, senor," was the simple response.

CHAPTER IX.

A DOOR OF DEATH.

By this time there was a thundering against the secret door in the wall, a thud and shock that made splinters of rock fly around.

It was dangerous to delay another second, if there was a way of escape at hand, for it might mean—it undoubtedly would mean—the death or capture of them all, and that would be death for Deadwood Dick.

"Not a second to lose, senor," urged the Mexican, grabbing up a stone from the floor and springing to obey Dick's directions. "They are using a ram, and the door must yield."

"Can't help it," returned the great detective, as calmly as if there was no danger. "No man appeals to Deadwood Dick in vain if I can help him. Ready, now, and don't either of you move."

"Don't fear that I will do so, sir," assured the chained man.

Dick had taken his position so that the bullet would strike the lock slightly at an angle, and Bamford was holding the light to advantage.

The moment the Mexican had the stone and lock in position, Dick fired a couple of shots in quick succession. The lock fell apart and the chain was loosened!

"God bless you for that!" cried Mr. Hedgeworth, springing forward and offering his hand.

"Thank me later if you must do so," advised Dick, hurriedly. "Take the extra weapons Mr. Bamford has. Mexican, lead the way out of this with all the haste you know."

"If it is not already too late," supplemented the man.

"Too late? They are not in here yet, and we may get well away before the door falls."

"But they have means of blocking our way, unless we can reach a certain point and block theirs first. This way; let me take the light, senor."

He caught the light from Bamford's hand and darted across the room, turning a stone in the side of the wall.

Another door opened, disclosing a passage.

"Does this fasten on the other side?" asked Dick.

"No, it does not, senor."

"Hurry on, then; we are at your heels."

At that moment a stone of the door in the chamber fell from its place under the blows of the battering-ram, and the loud voices without could be distinctly heard.

"Surrender, you dogs!" was the shout. "Your way is cut off! If you do not give up instantly you will get no mercy!"

No response was made, but the four made haste along the passage.

"How can they cut us off now?" asked Dick.

"By a falling door," was the reply. "If they can get that lowered before we get to it, we are like rats in a trap."

"And how did you mean that we might cut them off?"

"If we reach a certain point beyond we can lower the door ourselves, and they can follow us no farther."

"Hasten, then, for all you are worth!"

They ran along the passage, the rock floor beneath them sounding peculiarly hollow under their tread.

Presently their Mexican guide uttered a cry of alarm and dismay.

"The door!" he cried, despairingly.

"Is it closed?" asked Dick.

"See! it is nearly down! Valgame Dios! I can die but once! It is sure death for me to remain, and the door can only crush me!"

He redoubled his speed, having put down the lamp in haste—and fortunately it did not go out—and those behind him now saw what a narrow chance he had for his life.

Deadwood Dick sprang after the guide, the dim light showing him the way.

Just ahead, barring the passage completely across, was a huge slab of solid rock that was dropping slowly and surely down, and was already within less than three feet of the bottom.

"My God!" cried Mr. Hedgeworth, "we are doomed!"

"The guide will be killed!" cried Bamford.

At that moment the other door went down with a loud crash, and wild yells were heard in their rear.

"Deadwood Dick, do not you try it!"

So warned Mr. Hedgeworth.

"It is my only hope!" Dick shouted back.

"To remain here is death certain; here is a possible chance."

The guide had now reached the falling door, and he threw himself on the floor and rolled under with a quickness that was astonishing, having just room enough to permit of his doing so.

Deadwood Dick was only a stride behind him, but when he threw himself on the floor the door had dropped so much farther that it caught him and it was almost a squeeze. Nevertheless, he did not draw back, but forced himself under the massive stone.

"Great Heavens!" Mr. Hedgeworth screamed aloud. "He is crushed, he is crushed!"

Dick was fast, or seemed to be, and a second's delay in that critical position would certainly seal his fate.

Mr. Hedgeworth and Bamford looked away, unable to witness the frightful end of their brave and true friend, for his death seemed certain.

At the moment when they turned their heads, however, the Mexican on the other side of the stone door caught hold of Dick by arm and leg, and a strong jerk pulled him through.

When Hedgeworth and Bamford looked again the door was down, but there was no mangled body beneath it!

It was a moment before Dick recovered from the squeeze.

"You have saved my life, Mexican," he asserted. "I will not forget it if we get out of here alive!"

"As I want you to save mine, now that I am an outcast from the band," was the response. "With the law against me on one hand and the Flock of Forty on the other, what hope have I?"

"We'll see," encouraged Dick. And then, putting his mouth close to the bottom of the door, he called out:

"Friends!"

"We hear you," came the faint response.

"Be of good cheer; I will save you if it can be done!"

"Thank God you have escaped with your life!" Bamford's voice made return. "Save yourself, and leave us to our fate!"

"Never!" cried Dick. "If I live, and if your lives are spared, I swear that I will rescue you from this band of cutthroat devils. If you are killed, then I will avenge you!"

Doubtful if his last words were heard, for at that moment, with yells of exultation, the bandits came to where the prisoners were standing at bay.

"Come!" warned the Mexican, pulling Dick's sleeve, "we must get out of this!"

"Yes, we can do nothing further here."

They hastened along the passage.

"Ah, ha!" cried the chieftain of the band, with exultation, when he saw the closed door, and the men crouching against it, "we caught you!"

"But not all of them!" cried his lieutenant. "Where are the others?"

"Curses! He was in time to get under!"

"Back!" cried Mr. Hedgeworth, leveling his revolver straight at the breast of the commander. "If you attempt to take us it will signal the death of some of your number!"

"Fools!" was the retort. "We are twenty to one against you! If you resist it will be the worse for you."

"What will you do with us?" demanded Bamford.

"You shall pay dearly before you leave our hands after this hour's work, be assured," was the significant rejoinder.

"And you will pay with your lives this minute if you do not drop your weapons and surrender," added the lieutenant. "Twenty guns are covering your hearts at this instant!"

Ominous clicks were heard on every hand, and fate was entirely against the two hapless men in the power of these bandits. There could be no question that resistance meant death, and, acting as with one accord, the prisoners dropped their weapons to the floor.

In another minute they were again securely bound.

CHAPTER X.

DOUBLE REVENGE.

It had been their only resource; to have resisted would have been to invite instant death at the hands of their captors.

By surrendering, they might have a chance for their lives, a respite, at any rate, and with Deadwood Dick at liberty, that might mean their ultimate deliverance.

"There, curse you both!" cried the chieftain of the horde. "What good did it do you?"

"Not our fault, but our misfortune, that we did not get away," retorted Mr. Hedgeworth, bitterly. "One minute sooner, and you would not have caught us so easily."

"But would have caught you just the same," assured the chieftain. "Do not imagine that your would-be rescuer will get away."

"Do not think that you will easily get him either," said Bamford.

"Every pass is guarded," declared the commander, "and it will be utterly impossible for him to get out of the circle without the proper password. Moreover, I shall telephone to every sentinel to be more than alert."

"Nevertheless, it is Deadwood Dick, the famous detective, with whom you have to deal," reminded Mr. Hedgeworth, perhaps boastfully. "He has overcome greater odds than you can array against him. He has promised to rescue us out of your hands speedily."

"Has he, indeed? Ha, ha, ha! Well, well, it is one thing to promise, but quite another thing to perform, as he will find. I promise you that to-morrow at daylight you shall see him hanged. Let us see whose promise will hold good, his or mine. Back to the room with them, my loyal fellows!"

The prisoners were roughly jostled back along the passage to the room from which they had escaped.

No mention had been made of the missing Mexican.

"Now, secure them again in their chains," the chieftain ordered, "and this time a guard will be placed over them. We'll see if you will get another chance to escape."

Men sprang to obey the order, but they immediately uttered exclamations of surprise.

"What is it?" asked their commander.

"The locks," they answered; "they have been shattered by bullets!"

The chieftain looked, and his surprise was stamped on his face.

"Well, it will take more than bullets another time," he grimly declared.

"What will you do?" asked his lieutenant.

"I will rivet them!"

The men uttered ejaculations of approval and the two prisoners turned despairing looks upon each other.

"Perhaps you will think better about your refusal to buy your liberty, Mr. Hedgeworth," the rascal added. "You will have to do that, or die a death the most miserable here."

"Not a penny for ransom," the railroad magnate cried, firmly. "You may do your worst, and still I defy you, you scoundrel!"

"Ha, ha! We'll see how long your nerve will hold out."

"Yes, you will see."

"Boys, bring the furnace, and tongs and hammers. If he had the coolness to let Deadwood Dick shoot his fetters off, he will have the courage to allow us to rivet them on again, no doubt."

Some of the fellows hastened to fetch the articles required.

"And what is my fate to be?" asked Bamford.

"The same," the answer.

"And what will be the figure of my ransom?"

"Well, you are not a millionaire, so it will have to be less than that of your partner in misery. I have fixed his at two hundred and fifty thousand, and will make yours twenty-five thousand."

"You will never get it," said the prisoner, grimly.

"Oh, yes, we shall, too."

"I say you never will! I have little to live for in this world, and I will never pay it!"

"Your old father will, then. He will pay that much for his son, you know well enough. Likewise your son, sir," to Hedgeworth, "will cheerfully pay the larger sum for you."

"You will see, curse you!"

"We expect to."

"By the way, Franklin Furniss," spoke Bamford, "have you not had revenge upon me in full measure for your fancied wrongs?"

"Ha! why did you speak of it? For the moment it had slipped my mind, and I might not have recalled it. I have declared that I would have your life for that!"

"I speak of it because it is the thing nearest my heart, and I ask you again, have you not had revenge enough?"

"Revenge enough? You call this revenge? No, it will be sweet to see you kicking the empty air from the limb of a

tree. I will take the twenty-five thousand all the same, too!"

"You know what I refer to," bitterly.

"I begin to perceive that I do not know what you mean."

"Did you not steal my boy—my only child—from me ten years ago, out of revenge?"

The chieftain of the bandits gave a start of surprise.

"No, I never did," he declared, and there was that about his manner that bore witness to the truth of his assertion.

"You did not?"

"I did not; I never heard of it."

"Furniss, I believe you, I have to believe you. If it were true, it would be sweet for you to fling the assurance in my face. Do you swear that you did not take the boy—that you do not know where he is?"

"Yes, I swear to it, for I do not want credit for any more evil than belongs to me. None the less, I am glad that such an affliction came upon you, even though it was not of my working. You deserved it; you had no mercy on me when you came to Chihuahua."

"You blame me without reason, Furniss. You were incompetent, and you were dishonest, two reasons why you would have failed eventually, even with no opposition. I entered the field openly and honestly, the trade came my way, and I reaped the harvest. But are you honest in your assertion about my boy? I fear you are only playing with my feelings."

"I have told you the truth; I know nothing about him. My revenge can be made sweet enough without claiming anything of that for myself."

Bamford groaned. The old wound was opened afresh.

"Furniss," he spoke, "is it possible that I have blamed you all these ten years for a thing you did not do? And if I have, what was the fate of that boy? Who did steal him from me? And why? You remember the threats you made, when the boy was missing I thought immediately of you, and laid it at your door."

"Ha, ha, ha! Then my revenge has been going on all the while, though it was not of my working."

"If you have spoken truly."

"I can only give you the oath of a bandit chief that I have told you the truth."

"Then, in Heaven's name, spare my life that I may solve the mystery and find my boy, if living, or learn of his fate if he be dead! Take to yourself the satisfaction of knowing that I have suffered blaming you; that my wife spent nine long years in tears, and died at last heartbroken; that my whole life has been blasted—take that, but let me live to find my boy."

"Oh, ho! How nicely fate has paved the way for me to enjoy the fullness of revenge when the time came! And the time is now. I can laugh at your misery, and scorn your breaking heart. I will wring even the heart of your old father, for it was he who backed you financially against me; I will make him suffer, too. Ha, ha, ha! I will make him pay the money, promising to release you, and then will send him your head in exchange! Fate, good dame, I thank you!"

Again the thorough scoundrel laughed, and Bamford turned away his head to hide his emotion.

By this time a glowing furnace had been brought, together with tools, and the work of riveting the prisoners' chains was begun and carried out, and they were made secure with chains around their necks and middle, and these chains secured to the mentioned rings in the walls.

And thus they were left, under guard, and the bandit chief went away with taunts upon his lips.

CHAPTER XI.

DEATH AND CAPTURE.

Meanwhile what of Deadwood Dick and his Mexican pard?

Immediately after his promise to his friends, after escaping with his life from under the stone door, he sprang to his feet and turned to the Mexican.

They were now in darkness, but instinctively Dick knew where the man stood. He put out his hand and touched him, at the same time bidding him lead the way out, if he knew it.

"Come this way, senor," was the response, and the man grabbed Dick's arm and ran.

They had to run with caution, however, and Dick held his right arm in front of his head as a protection against striking anything.

"What are our chances?" Dick asked.

"One in a hundred," was the response. "Every pass is guarded, and guarded well."

"Then what is your plan?"

"There is just one chance that we may be able to steal around the guard at one point."

"Then we will take that chance. Lead the way, and trust me to do my part if it comes to a pinch. It will mean death for you if we are retaken, and no less for me."

They pressed forward with all haste, the rock floor beneath them still giving out the hollow sound we have mentioned once before. At times it was dull, and far away, denoting thickness, and anon so loud that Dick felt some misgivings for the security of the footway.

"What is under here?" he asked his companion.

"I don't know," was the answer; "I don't know whether any of the band knows."

Presently the sound denoted that the floor was solid, and they heard no more of the drum-like echo answering their every footfall. A short time later the damp night wind fanned their faces.

The Mexican held back, then, speaking a word of caution.

"Where are we?" asked Dick.

"On a ledge, where the slightest misstep will cost us our lives," was the thrilling response.

"And with the footing none too secure, the way it is raining, I take it," said Dick. "No matter, we have got to face the music, so lead the way, since I suppose you know the trail."

"Yes, it is all that you say it is," assured the Mexican. "It may be all our lives are worth to risk it, but it is death to remain here. Take hold of my coat, and, if you feel me slip, let go and save yourself, if you can. If you slip, I cannot hold you."

"I understand," said Dick. "Do not be afraid that I will drag you down if I slip. In fact, I will not take hold of you at all; you just caution me how the way is as you go along. How much is there of the ledge to be traversed before we shall have securer footing? I was thinking of my horse as we came along, but now I am glad I have not got him."

The men advanced, the Mexican answering the question and stating that there was about a quarter of a mile of the dangerous pathway to be passed, and thus they talked in subdued tones.

Slowly they felt their way along, at times in places where it seemed about an even chance whether they could retain their hold or must fall, and at last the Mexican announced that they were safe from that danger.

Barely had the words left his lips when the clang of a gong was heard somewhere overhead, and an oath escaped the Mexican the same moment.

"They have moved the signal," he exclaimed.

"And the guard has notice of our presence here?" asked Dick.

"Yes."

"Then we are in a tight box."

"Yes, but we must get out of it. Come on, and do not speak unless you have to."

"All right."

"Your Spanish has a foreign sound."

"I understand; I rely on you, but if you fail and it comes to a fight, I think I can make myself understood in that kind of talk."

"As we both will."

"You said they had moved the signal; will that interfere with your plans?"

"Yes; for I hoped to get around the guard without tripping the signal wire. Now we have got to face the music and do the best we can with him when he challenges."

The next moment the challenge was heard.

"Halt! Who comes?"

"Has any one passed this way?" quickly asked Dick's conductor.

"No," was the prompt rejoinder; "what is more, no one is going to pass!"

"But we are after an escaped prisoner," said Dick's friend, impatiently. "If he has not passed, then he must have slipped off the ledge, or else you are betraying your trust."

"Valgame Dios! Do you want me to put a bullet into you? You cannot pass here, so go back the way you came."

"Have you heard from the chief?"

"I told you what my orders are. No one can pass till that order is recalled."

"You did not say it was your order. That is a different thing, then. We will return until we meet the others, and you will pass the chief when he comes, no doubt."

"You can tell him I have sent you back, and will send him back himself, unless I see his face and know it is he."

"But you are sure no one has passed?"

"Quite sure."

The Mexican turned back, pulling Dick's sleeve, and the sound of their footsteps were soon beyond the guard's hearing.

"Now for it," the Mexican whispered.

"We will remove our boots and steal past his post before he can suspect what we are up to. If we are discovered, shoot in the direction of his voice."

"Just what I was tempted to do before," said Dick.

Their boots removed, they retraced their steps silently, hugging the wall closely, and ere long had passed the point where the sentinel was stationed.

"That was well done," Dick complimented his friend, in whom he had recognized a brainy and fearless and worthy comrade. "That is one difficulty overcome, and we are in good shape for the next. Where are we heading for?"

"For Devil's Delight."

"Whew! Is there no way of getting around?"

"No; we have got to pass through a tunnel, presently, and will come out right in the camp."

"And what then?"

"Steal a couple of horses, if possible, and away."

"I will help you to do that, but as for me, I must remain there and attempt the rescue of those prisoners."

"It is madness!" cried the Mexican. "You can do nothing alone. Your only hope is to get down to the nearest post and get a force, and, knowing the way, the band can be hemmed in."

"It will not work," said Dick. "They will hold the lives of those two men against us, and what could we do? No; it must be done by stratagem, and I must

remain and work it alone. But there is a part you can play; you must make good your escape and reach Chihuahua."

"And be arrested!"

"I will give you a note to deliver to Sigmund Bamford, and he will see that help is raised."

"Well, I will act your pleasure, senor, and you may fully trust me. What I want is to become an honest man, and I would like to be your aid in the work you do."

"We will talk of that later. Press on."

But they were not out of the woods, nor were their foes remaining passive. The stone door in the mountain passageway had been lifted, and men were on their trail from that direction. More, the band's allies in Devil's Delight had been apprised by telephone, and were moving toward them from the opposite direction. Would it be possible for them to escape?

Escape they did not. At the entrance to the tunnel the Mexican had mentioned they were ordered to halt, and, knowing that to stop meant their capture, they dashed forward in the darkness, firing as they ran. Cries of pain immediately came in response, and, too, a volley greater than they had anticipated, under which the Mexican went down, hard hit, to rise no more. The same moment Deadwood Dick was seized by a dozen hands!

CHAPTER XII.

A TIMELY MISTAKE.

The wonder was that the hero of a hundred adventures was not killed then and there, for his captors were infuriated against him.

The only thing that saved his life undoubtedly was the fact that it had been ordered that he should be taken alive if possible. That he had escaped a bullet, however, had been almost a miracle.

His captors were mostly Mexicans, as he recognized by their Spanish chatter, in which was much of hatred against himself.

Dick felt a heavy ache in his heart for the fate of his Mexican companion.

"Well, we have got you, after all," cried an American voice.

"It seems so," was Dick's cool response.

"And this will end your little caper," said his captor. "To-morrow you will hang as high as we can swing you!"

"Why not at once?" Dick asked.

He thought he recognized the voice, but could not be positive. He took it to be John Garrat, the mayor of the camp.

"Because the order is to hold you till morning, and because it is raining too hard for the boys to enjoy the fun. Bind him, fellows, and take his weapons. He is done for this time."

Dick said no more, knowing that resistance was useless and parley more so.

The order was obeyed, and they entered a tunnel and pressed forward in the direction of the camp where Dick's night's adventures had begun only a short time before.

A light was made as they proceeded by one of the men in advance, and by its rays Dick saw that his captors numbered fully a score. Those in the rear were bringing along the body of the poor fellow who had lost his life, and Dick mentally vowed that he would avenge him.

The camp reached, Dick was bound with ropes so tightly that he could not move an arm nor a leg, and in that fix was thrown into an empty, floorless shanty, and the door was locked upon him.

"Rest there," said the leader, who, by the way, had put on a mask before Dick got a sight of his face. "We'll attend to you in the morning."

"I'll wait here for you," said Dick, with grim humor.

"Yes, I think you will."

They went off, and Dick fell to thinking, wondering how he was going to extricate himself from such a dilemma.

It did not seem possible that he could do so—in fact, the impossibility of his doing it was all too apparent. Yet if he remained there till morning his death was certain.

"Well, what can't be cured must be endured, the old saw says," he said to himself, "and maybe I have run my course about far enough anyhow. Still, I hate to leave those two men in their bad fix, and I hate to let this band of cut-throats go unpunished."

He was helpless, however, and at last resolved to sleep, if he could, and trust to the morrow. He had been in so many tight places, and had had so many narrow escapes that he had long ago learned never to give up.

He was nearly asleep when something touched him.

"St!" a voice hissed.

"Well?" Dick asked, in whisper.

"You are the man who was in the Hang-up to-night?"

"Same chap," was Dick's ready return.

"Who are you, and what's wanted?"

"I am Little Billy. Injun Inez has sent me here to set you free, and she wants to see you."

"All right in regard to the first part of the programme; as to the second, what does she want to see me for?"

"I don't know that; all I have got to do is to perform my little trick and not get caught at it. You don't want to make a noise as loud as a mouse."

"Trust me for that," said Dick.

"Here you go, then, and you must hold still so I don't slice your meat while I am at work."

The boy thereupon felt for a place of beginning, and his knife was immediately at work severing Dick's bonds. In a few minutes Dick was once more free and on his feet.

"I am a heap obliged to you, my lad," he said, in a whisper. "I won't forget this, and if I can do anything for you in the future you have only to let me know it. Now, how to get out of here? That is the next thing on the programme. How did you get in?"

"There is a hole at the back where I crawled under, and I have got on a pair of man's boots so that my tracks won't give me away. There will be music in the morning when they miss you."

"Not a doubt of it."

"And there will be mourning if they can find out who let you out, so you see I have done a ticklish job."

"I appreciate it, my lad. Now, where is this hole? Is it big enough for me to get through? But, if it isn't, we can soon make it so, if we are not discovered."

"Here it is, right here."

Dick felt.

"I guess I can make it," he said. "You go out first and get off far enough so you will not be taken if I am discovered, and then I'll squeeze through. When you hear a cricket chirp you will know I am out all right."

"That's plain. Be as still as you can about it, for there is another shanty not ten feet away."

The boy got down and crawled out, and when he had been gone a few moments Dick essayed to follow, but the hole was too small. Feeling around, he soon got hold of an old bit of pottery, and with that he was not long in making it larger.

He squeezed through, and after listening a moment, imitated a cricket.

The answer was heard, a little distance off, and going in that direction he soon fell in with his youthful rescuer.

"Which way?" he asked.

"Right this way," answered the boy, taking his sleeve and conducting him.

"Who is this Injun Inez you speak about?" Dick asked, as they went along through the driving rain. "The woman who was in the hotel to-night, I take it."

"Yes. She's my mother, I suppose, though some say she's too old. Anyhow, she takes care of me when she is sober enough, and that is all I could ask of her, I suppose. Sonora Sam foots the bills."

"Who is he?"

"One of the Flock of Forty."

"Ah! Then you know something about them, do you?"

"Rather. They make this place their base of supplies, and pretend they don't belong here."

"Maybe you know some of their secrets."

"Not many; but there are not many that Injun Inez does not know, and as she has taken a liken' to you, she will maybe post you, if you want to be posted any more'n you have been already. Ha, ha, ha!"

The boy laughed lightly, but the next moment signaled caution.

"Here we are," he said.

A couple of steps then brought them to a shanty, where the boy tapped lightly on the door.

The door was opened immediately, letting out a dim bar of light, and the face of the hideous old crone appeared at the opening, and her bead-like eyes peered out.

"It's all right, mother," said the boy.

"Here he is."

"Come in quickly," piped the old woman. "I have been trembling for you, Billy, but it was right that you should take the risk for him."

"Oh! I got him all right, you bet! Come right in, sir, and hear what it is mother has got to say to you, for it is something important, you may be sure of that."

Dick squeezed in and shut the door, and lifted the brim of his dripping hat just at the moment when the woman turned the light a little higher and took a look at him, and the instant she did so an almost scream escaped her, and she quickly exclaimed:

"Ave Maria! It is not the one; what care I for this fellow? Take him back where you found him—"

"That is not to be thought of, my good woman," said Dick, interrupting her. "I am sorry to disappoint you by not being the man you thought you were saving, but as he is my friend, and I have sworn to save him, maybe you will be willing to aid me in that."

CHAPTER XIII.

DICK'S NEW ALLIES.

The old crone looked the rage she undoubtedly felt.

By her own assertion, the man she had desired to save was Bamford, and not Deadwood Dick. She could not have made a better beginning in the desired direction, though she probably would not have had the brains to reason it out that way. It looked as if Providence had interfered in Dick's behalf.

The shanty they were in, by the way, had two rooms, one being little better than an open shed in the rear, and it was in this room that the three were in conversation. From the other room came the deep sound of a man's snoring, and as Dick concluded his last-quoted remark he asked who the man was.

He was informed that it was the fellow called Tony Bly.

"Injun Inez is no fool," spoke up Little Billy, who could talk English almost as well as Dick, and who had all the mining camp slang at his tongue's end.

"What do you mean?" Dick asked.

"Why, don't you see? If the rain don't wash out our tracks, they will lead here to Tony's shebang, and he will get the blessing for setting you free."

"That is rather a dastardly trick to play on an innocent man," said Dick, who could not approve of anything of the sort. "What if they suspect and hang him for a thing he had no part in?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled the old hag. "What better could I ask than that? Many a time I have been tempted to murder him, but I would not dare do that, for it would be laid to my door immediately. I have heard his name till it is hateful to me!"

"What is there about it?" asked Dick.

"I'll tell ye," spoke up Little Billy. "The men of the camp have fun with mom and Tony, trying to make a match between them, and Injun Inez won't have it. She hates him worse'n poison."

"And what about Tony?" Dick inquired, amused.

"Why, he likes Injun Inez just about as well as she likes him, so it is about even. All the same, the men will have fun, and they keep it going."

"Never mind," Dick immediately waived, speaking seriously again. "You are interested in saving the life of Sigmund Bamford, Injun Inez, and I want your aid toward that end."

"Well, I'll give it," was the promise. "You are a brave man. Satan himself could not have twice escaped from the Flock of Forty in one night, as you have done. Not one man in a thousand could have done it, and I believe the devil is on your side."

"If so, he allowed me to get into a pretty bad scrape at last," said Dick. "Put out that light and let us talk in the dark. The light may be seen."

This advice was obeyed.

"Now," Dick asked, "what is your interest in Bamford?"

"Why should I tell you that?" the old hag demanded. "You are not Bamford."

"No, but I am his friend, and am here in his interest. I am of the opinion that you know something about him of interest to me."

"It is of interest only to him."

"Suppose he is killed before he can be rescued, what then?"

"In that case it will be time enough to tell you, if you can prove that you are his friend."

"Do you doubt that?"

"I have no proof of it."

"If not my friend, why would I risk my life by following his captors into their lair in order to rescue him out of their hands? And I would have done it, too, with one minute more of time."

"You did that?"

Dick told what had taken place briefly. "I had not heard that," the crone declared. "I thought it was Bamford alone had made his escape; that's how I came to think he was their prisoner in the shanty."

"Well, is not that proof enough that I am devoted to him?"

"Yes, it is enough."

"Then trust me."

"What business brought him here?"

"I cannot answer questions unless you will promise to do the same."

"Well, I will answer question for question."

"Good enough. He came here seeking revenge upon a man who has done him a great wrong."

"I thought so. Does he know who that man is?"

"Hold on. It is my turn to ask a question. Do you know who the man is who has wronged Sigmund Bamford, and is it concerning that that you wanted to talk with Bamford?"

"Yes."

"Very good. It is your turn."

Dick had put two questions in one, it will be seen.

"It is the question already asked," said the hag, who was keen to a degree.

"Yes, he knows who the man is, of course," said Dick. "He is known here as Franklin Hughes, but his real name is Furniss. He is posing here as a mine owner."

"Wrong, wrong!"

"What's that?"

"I say he is wrong. Not that Hughes may not have done something to him in the past, but not the thing to which I refer."

"Then to whom do you refer, and to what thing do you refer?"

"I speak of a fellow called Sonora Sam—curse him!—and the wrong he did was the stealing of Bamford's child ten years ago."

Dick gave a start, which made no difference, it being dark.

"Well, it is your turn to put a question," he said, speaking as calmly as if he had learned nothing of importance.

"Is that the business that brought you here?"

"Yes."

"I thought so," chuckled the crone.

"Now, who is this man, Sonora Sam, and where is he to be found?" Dick again put two questions in one.

"He is a cut-throat, and belongs to the Flock of Forty. I have no doubt he is with them here to-night, for this camp is in reality their headquarters."

"I am well aware of that part of it," said Dick. "Mayor Garrat's little horse-play at the Hang-up Hotel did not close my eye any. I knew that the camp and the cut-throats were as one."

"And you were a brave man to dare to enter their stronghold."

"How much are you willing to tell me concerning this matter between Sonora Sam and Bamford?" Dick asked.

"The whole, now."

"Do you do this out of regard for Bamford or out of revenge against Sonora Sam for something he has done?"

"Well, it is both. Sonora Sam has not used me right, and I am going to pay him back for it, though I would like to set the matter right, anyhow. But if I tell you the story it will steal time from you."

"I have all the time there is."

"You must escape."

"Half an hour can make little difference, and if you are to aid me, we must have a perfect understanding before I go away."

"Yes, yes; that is so. Bamford must not lose his life, for that would please Sonora Sam all too well. I will cheat him of his revenge at last, though Heaven knows he has had sufficient."

At that moment there was a stir in the other room, and Tony Bly ceased his snoring. There was the sound as of some one moving about in the dark.

The trio in the shed observed strict silence.

Deadwood Dick was unarmed, save with the weapons with which nature had kindly endowed him, but even these were formidable enough.

Dick stood ready for whatever might come, but it soon became evident that the person moving about was Tony Bly himself, and presently, after a moment of silence, he was heard to mutter:

"Ah! there's to your health, Dick Kelly, and that finishes the bottle. The best treat I have had in a dog's age. I hope the phantom coffin will come again, or some other disturbance that will give me another chance at your stock. Serves you right for your meanness!"

Deadwood Dick felt the old crone shak-

ing with suppressed laughter, as they listened, but of course did not know then what it was about. She had "doctored" the remainder of the stuff in the bottle while awaiting the return of Little Billy. That by the way. The snoring was soon resumed, and after an earnest talk with the old hag and little Billy, Deadwood Dick secured weapons and stole out of the sleeping camp.

CHAPTER XIV.

TONY BLY'S HOT DOSE.

By daylight the storm had cleared.

The wind had abated, and there was a balmy freshness in the mountain air that was delightful.

That is to say—delightful to those who were in condition to enjoy it. There were some who were not in that condition, and notably among those was Tony Bly.

About daybreak he came tumbling out of his shanty with something akin to a roar. He was half doubled up with the most intense pain and burning he had ever experienced in his life, the result of the dose Injun Inez had given him on the sly in the manner shown.

Many blessings come to us in disguise.

This was a blessing to the old camp bum, though it would have been an impossibility to convince him of it just then.

The tracks leading from the shanty from which Deadwood Dick had made his escape were still visible, and had they not been disturbed could have been traced straight to Tony's domicile.

It would have been the hardest thing in the world for Tony to have convinced the mayor of the camp and the good citizens generally that he had had nothing to do with the escape of the prisoner. As it came out, he was not called on for any such defense.

"Ka-whoop!" he bellowed, as he tumbled out of his slab palace. "Oh! my inner man, my inner man! A doctor! a doctor! My kingdom for a doctor—if I had a kingdom to offer! I have been poisoned! Ka-whoop! ka-whoop! Wake up, ye sleepers, and do something for a dying man! Come out here, I implore of you, and put out the fire that is raging within me! Oh! oh! What shall I do, what shall I do? Hell were a bed of roses compared to this! Fire! fire! fire!"

So he whooped, while he ran around and around his shanty, holding himself in the middle with both arms, ever and anon leaning against the building and groaning dismally when an extra hard spasm overcame him.

His last cry brought the citizens out of their wigwams and wickiups, to use the terms, in both dress and undress.

They looked for the fire, but it was not to be seen.

As fast as they discovered where the commotion was, one after another they ran toward Tony's shanty from every direction.

By the time thirty or forty had reached the scene, Tony was rolling on the ground by the rear door of his shanty, moaning and groaning, and his cries at times were startling.

"My inner man! oh! my inner man!" he yelled. "Won't somebody give me something to put out the fire? Will you see me suffer, and not lift a finger to aid me? Bring a doctor, bring a doctor! Bring a horse doctor, if there is no other! Do something for my relief!"

"What's the matter with you?" demanded the mayor.

"Oh! most noble khan, illustrious caliph!" the sufferer wailed, "I am all on fire within, all on fire within! This is the end—the end! This is what the fiery coffin foretold!"

"Begorra, it is more loike it was a thrick

to get a dhrink fur nothing out av some av us fur sympathy wi'd ye," declared Dick Kelly. "Av it is, don't t'ink dhat ye can work dhe racket on us, fur ye can't do it fur wan cint, begob! Ye are too well known, Tony Bly."

"Oh, oh!" yelled the sufferer. "My vitals are being consumed within me! Will no one take pity on me and do something? I have been poisoned—poisoned! Oh! that I were this moment back in the dear old college, where they would pump me out! Why will ye remain deaf to my appeal? Can you not see for yourself how I am suffering?"

"It does look like the real thing," said the mayor.

"Av he wasn't always up to such thricks fur a dhrink," reminded the proprietor of the Hang-up.

"Take my word! take my word only this once!" cried Bly. And in his agony he scrambled up and took another turn or two around his shanty, acting like a crazy man.

Merry Mike just then came up.

"Begorra, look at dhe way he is sweat-in!" he exclaimed. "He could never do dhat fur fun."

"That is what I claim now," agreed the mayor. "Dick, we'll have to do something for the poor devil, or see him die. We'll have him explain it after he gets better."

"Don't delay! don't delay!" cried Tony. "Give me something to cool my stomach, I care not what it is! Water! water! Let me try water! For the love of Heaven, pour me full of water and see if that will not quench the raging flames that devour me!"

"Begorra, dhat settles it!" exclaimed Kelly. "He would never ask fur wather av he was shammin'! Come along wi'd ye, Tony, and Oi'll give ye somethin' dhat is betther nor wather. Oi would be dhe last man to give in to yure foolin', and, by dhe same token, dhe last wan to refuse ye whin ye really made it. Come along to me hotel."

Tony waited not to be asked again, nor did he wait to be conducted. He led the van, running as fast as he could in his handicapped condition, past the shanty from which Deadwood Dick had escaped and on to the hotel, and, the crowd following him, all the previous tracks were obliterated, and thus, as said, his suffering was a blessing in disguise, for no suspicion fell upon him when eventually the discovery was made that the prisoner was gone.

Reaching the hotel, Tony rushed in, Kelly having left the door open on coming out, and he made a leap for the shelf behind the bar, taking the first bottle he came to.

"Help yureself," said Kelly, who was right at his heels. "Av it is playing ye are, ye have done it foine enough to deserve a trate."

"As if I would be doing this for fun?" gasped the victim.

Jerking the stopper out of the bottle, he threw back his head and fairly poured the stuff down his throat, but in the next second he gave voice to a frightful shriek and ran for the open door.

And so he continued, shriek after shriek, as he bounded away in the direction of the creek, and the moment he reached the water he plunged in as if he intended to commit suicide to end his misery. But, no, he only lay there and drank his fill.

The water had the desired effect. It cooled the burning, and in the course of about ten minutes Tony Bly came up out of the creek, pale, weak, but cured forever of his craving for drink.

Verily, he had been twice blessed.

A quiet but amused observer of it all

had been Injun Inez. She had taken it all in, remaining on the outer circle of the crowd, and when Tony disappeared within his shanty she went off to her own domicile laughing.

It was about that time that the discovery was made that Deadwood Dick had effected his escape, and there was a shout in the camp then, as may be believed. The mayor raved, the citizens searched everywhere for a clew, but all to no purpose—the prisoner was gone.

The mayor and Franklin Hughes drew apart from the crowd for a quiet talk.

"Now, what is going to be done?" the mayor asked.

"Do you think it necessary to do anything?" asked the pseudo-mining capitalist.

"Why not?"

"Do you think he will have the nerve to come here again?"

"The nerve? Did he not display his nerve well enough last night to satisfy you?"

"He was fighting then for his life. Only a fool would venture back here again, after that experience. He is a bold fellow, but he never tackled the Flock of Forty before."

"And we never tackled him before."

"Fools that we did not cut his miserable throat last night. It would have been done, too, if we could have nailed him in the old temple."

"Well, what is going to be done?" demanded Garrat. "We have either got to scare out or fight it out. And we have got too big game in our hands now to scare off."

"We will fight it out!" with a terrific oath. "Our messenger has gone to Chihuahua to make known our terms, and if we can hold things down for a little while we may scoop the wealth we have demanded. We must see it through. We will double our guard at every point, widen our circle, and if Deadwood Dick dares to poke his nose in here again it will seal his doom! As for a force, that could never reach us, you know."

"My hand on it," said Garrat, simply. "We'll fight it out to the bitter end."

CHAPTER XV.

DICK'S CHIHUAHUA DODGE.

Return we to Chihuahua.

When the suave stranger had gone from the office (inviting the reader's attention to a preceding chapter), Mr. Bamford and Mr. Hedgeworth looked at each other for a moment before either spoke.

"Well, he had it all his own way," Hedgeworth remarked. "I never heard of such brazen audacity before in my life. Mr. Bamford. An acknowledged outlaw coming here openly and boldly, dictating his terms and ordering how they shall be carried out!"

"And we are helpless to do anything but obey his directions," said the old man, heavily. "You are ordered to go alone, and you have only the word of an outlaw that you will not be taken prisoner and held for ransom the same as your father and my son. Or you may be robbed and killed, and the prisoners be no better off than now."

"No, I think they will deal fairly with me, with the hope of getting the big sum they ask for my father's release. To detain me would only block their prospects in that direction."

"Yes, that appears to be reasonable. I did not look far enough to take that view of it. And you will go?"

"There is nothing else I can do. You will send the money with me?"

"I have got to do it, sir."

"Then I will start at daylight, as ordered. Of course I do not hold myself responsible for the money, Mr. Bamford. I will perform the mission all right if permitted to do so."

"The risk is mine, Mr. Hedgeworth. But, what is the trouble in the store? I must see."

Some loud words had reached their ears.

Opening the door to step out, Mr. Bamford was met there by a clerk who looked somewhat excited, and who hastened to explain.

"A mendicant, sir, who insists on seeing you, and we were unable to put him out of the store, he is so strong. He says he has something important to say to you—"

"And so I have," spoke up a most miserable-looking specimen, who came forward. "I bring you a word of news, Mr. Bamford, which I must tell you in private, or not at all. I am a mendicant only in appearance," spoken in a much lower tone.

"Come into the office, sir," said Mr. Bamford. "You, Mr. Hedgeworth, remain with me."

"Hedgeworth?" said the seeming beggar.

"Yes."

"The man I want to see, beyond doubt. Let us go into the office, as suggested."

Mr. Bamford dismissed the clerks, telling them to say nothing and that he would take care of the "mendigo," and the three entered the office, and the door was closed.

"You have just had a visitor," remarked the stranger.

"You are not wrong," said Mr. Bamford.

"He has come to you from the Flock of Forty, with terms for the release of your son, and conditions for the release of Mr. Hedgeworth."

The two men looked at the stranger in surprise. Were they being favored with a visit from another of the same band? And, if so, what could his object be?

"Before we deny or acknowledge anything, let us know just who and what you are, sir, and what your business is with us," spoke Mr. Bamford. "Am I not right, Mr. Hedgeworth? We expect to keep our part of the compact with the man who has been to see us."

"You are a keen man, Mr. Bamford," said the unknown. "If I came here as a spy from the Flock of Forty, you are giving me reason for confidence in you and your intention. A card well played, sir. But my mission is of another character entirely. Since you have not penetrated my disguise, I have reason to believe that no one else has done so."

So saying, the stranger removed his battered hat, unwound the dirty kerchief from around his head, took off a false beard, and lo! it was Deadwood Dick, Junior!

"Mr. Bristol!" exclaimed Mr. Bamford.

"Not Deadwood Dick?" cried Mr. Hedgeworth, excitedly.

"At your service, gentlemen," said Dick, in his cool manner.

"We feared that you were dead," said Mr. Bamford. "What has happened?"

"I have to thank a kind Providence that I escaped with my life, sir," said Dick, reverently.

Forthwith, then, he told the story of his recent adventures, briefly and to the point, giving full credit to others and taking but little to himself for his escape.

"Too bad that my son did not escape with you," sighed Mr. Bamford.

"Better that he did not, perhaps," said Dick. "He might have shared the fate of that Mexican."

"That is true," said young Hedgeworth. "And my father might now be dead. Had he passed the door of stone as you did. In

fact, I do not see how you escaped with your life."

"I have told you—by a kind Providence," said Dick.

"And what now is to be done?"

"That is what has brought me here. Tell me what arrangements have been made with the agent of the brigands."

"Soon told," said Mr. Bamford, and he related the plan that had been fixed upon for the sending of the money by Hedgeworth, who was to be taken for an interview with his father.

"That is a good layout," observed Dick, thoughtfully, when he had heard all. "It ought to let me in somewhere, though I had another scheme formed in my mind that I think will work all right, if I can get back again to Devil's Delight unsuspected."

"What is your plan?" asked Mr. Bamford.

"It is hardly worth while to make it known, sir, for it may have to be changed, if not indeed abandoned altogether."

"Will it not be better to take advantage of the fact of my going to see my father to lay a new scheme?" suggested Hedgeworth. "Then, if that fail us, we can fall back upon the other."

"I must make the fact of your going, sir, contribute to the success of the other, I think," said Dick. "I would suggest that you allow me to be the one to pay the visit to your father, but now that their agent has seen you I could not so far deceive him."

"True; nor would I permit you to take again so much risk alone, sir," said young Hedgeworth. "No, we will work it together, or I will aid you as far as I am capable, being guided by you in everything. What plan of action do you suggest, sir?"

"I must have the details of the scheme as arranged by this agent of the Flock of Forty," said Dick.

These were given in full.

"And you start to-morrow morning?"

"Yes."

"Taking the money with you?"

"Yes, for nothing must be neglected that will awaken suspicion," said Mr. Bamford.

"Better so, if Mr. Hedgeworth is willing to take the risks," remarked Dick. "It will insure your getting the interview with your father, Mr. Hedgeworth, and I will try to be there."

"You will be there!"

"If it is possible to get there, and we together must free Mr. Bamford and your father."

"Impossible, impossible," said the old man, shaking his head. "They will kill you, and perhaps put the prisoners to death besides. No, no; you must take a force of soldiers—"

"That is far more impossible," Dick hastened to say, and he explained why. "No, nothing can be gained by force; strategy is the only means at our command. Let us put our heads together, Mr. Hedgeworth, and lay a scheme that will carry us through."

And this they did, remaining in conference for more than an hour, dwelling at length upon every detail, until their scheme was as nearly perfected as it was possible for them to make it. Finally Hedgeworth took his leave, returning to the hotel where he had left his friends, and Dick was shown out by a rear way and made his exit by another street.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE NOTICE ON THE TREE.

On the following morning Hedgeworth appeared at daylight, mounted and ready for his journey, and left Chihuahua by the trail the outlaw had mentioned.

No one was with him, he had been seen

speaking to no one, and no one was seen to follow him. For an hour, perhaps, no one set out upon the same trail, and then several men left Chihuahua on foot in the same direction.

These went independently of one another, and seemingly had nothing in common, but they had not proceeded a long way before they proved to be "birds of a feather." Ere they had gone a long distance farther they were mounted, and after a time they again parted company.

Meanwhile Samuel Hedgeworth, Jr., was going straight ahead on the trail, having seen no one, and there was nothing to arouse the suspicion of men who had been shadowing him closely to this time, from the hour when he had come out from Mr. Bamford's store in Chihuahua on the previous day. No stranger would guess or imagine that his saddle-bags were filled with gold.

Some miles out from the city, Hedgeworth came suddenly upon a horseman who was waiting for him at a bend of the trail.

He recognized the suave gentleman of the day before.

"Good-morning, Mr. Hedgeworth," was the greeting. "I suppose you have kept your word and have come alone?"

None knew that better than this very man himself, since he was one of those mentioned as having departed from Chihuahua an hour after Hedgeworth had set out upon the trail.

"Entirely alone, sir, believe me," assured Hedgeworth, after an exchange of greeting. "I suppose you are here to conduct me to the place where I am to have the interview with my father? The more I have thought about the matter, the plainer it seems that you hold the winning hand."

"I am glad that you see it in the right light, sir. Yes, I will conduct you to him, after the business matter concerning Bamford's son has been attended to. I suppose you have brought the gold?"

"It is here in these saddle-bags. It is for you to say what is to be done with it."

"No, it is not for me to say."

"Who, then?"

"The chief of the Forty."

"Well, no matter; you will help me to carry it in safety?"

"That is a part of the business I have to perform, sir. You are aware that it is a long distance?"

"I supposed it was not a short one, but I have no idea how far it is."

"We can do it in a day, by adding half of the night to the day, but if you prefer we can make two stages of the journey."

"If it is all the same to you, then, we will take two days for it."

"Very well."

Late in the afternoon, after many hours' riding and no adventure worth mentioning, they put up at a Mexican hacienda.

At an early hour on the following morning they resumed their journey, and ere the forenoon was spent were making their way up into the mountain fastnesses, in the direction of Devil's Delight.

Having nothing in common, save the guarding of the gold, their conversation had been scant enough.

Presently the guide remarked:

"We may expect to hear from the Flock of Forty at any time now, Mr. Hedgeworth."

"I am not sorry," was the response. "Anything to break this dreary monotony will be welcome. It even will be a relief to get among your cut-throat band, my safety assured."

"You apply a harsh name to us, Mr. Hedgeworth."

"Should I call them gentlemen?"

The other, who, by the way, had given

his name as Sonora Sam, laughed lightly, and no more was said.

In the course of the hour they came to an open glade in the mountains, where some splendid trees offered inviting shade if they would stop there to rest, and of a sudden Sonora Sam drew rein.

"Look there!" he cried, pointing to a notice on one of the trees. "We have directions what to do!"

Hedgeworth looked at the placard in surprise.

It ran thus, with some further directions in Spanish:

"LEAVE THE GOLD HERE IN THE HOLLOW OF THE TREE. "F. OF F."

"And we are to leave it here?" Hedgeworth asked, in surprise.

"Most certainly; so we are told to do."

"But suppose this is not genuine? Suppose it is only a trick to get the money—"

"No, no, I know better than that. See what is said in Spanish. I am told to look in the hollow of the tree for my further directions."

So saying, Sonora Sam rode up to the tree, tore down the placard, and there was the hollow exposed to view, the placard having been tacked over it, and into that hollow he thrust his hand.

He drew out a folded piece of paper, which he read aloud:

"S. S.: Your man reached us. All right. Leave the gold and come on with the man for the interview. Tell him that he will be in no danger, and will be allowed to depart as he came. This interview, however, must be to the point, and final."

"COMMANDER, F. OF F."

"Well, I have nothing to say," remarked Hedgeworth. "If you insist that it is all right, here we will deposit the money."

"It is what you are ordered to do. I might add that if you do not do so, something may happen that is not expressed here on the poster, nor yet in the note I have read to you."

"And what might that be?"

The man merely shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, here are the bags," said Hedgeworth. "Deposit them, and let us press on. The further I proceed, the more convinced I am that my father will have to give what you demand."

"I think you will be the more convinced of it presently," was the grim rejoinder.

Hedgeworth handed the bags to his guide, who put them into the hollow of the tree as directed, and they rode on their way.

"How much further to that camp?" asked Hedgeworth. "To Devil's Delight?"

"We are not going there, for they might interfere if they happen to suspect that I am one of the Flock of Forty."

"Then they are not friendly to the Flock?"

"Far from it! The Flock has more than once despoiled some of their good citizens."

Hedgeworth knew the man was lying, after the revelation made by Deadwood Dick, but it was policy for him to pretend that he was deceived and raise no argument.

"Then we will go direct to the stronghold?"

"Yes; that is our destination."

Ere long, at a rough and rocky point, where their horses' hoofs left no marks, they turned aside and scrambled over the stones until they presently dropped into another trail.

Sonora Sam now enjoined silence, and in silence they proceeded, the trail leading them up into a deep and narrow mountain defile.

Finally, somewhere above them, the clang of a signal gong was heard, resounding with startling clearness, and in an-

other moment it struck once again. We have noticed it before.

A little further, and then the challenge:

"Halt! Who comes?"

"One of the Forty, with a visitor."

"Advance, One, and give the counter-sign."

Sonora Sam rode forward and spoke a word in a low tone.

It was enough, and they were allowed to pass without further hindrance.

They continued on in silence, and presently yet another signal gong rang out the number of approaching horsemen.

Finally they came in sight of the old Aztec temple already described, which looked far less hideous under the light of day than it had in the darkness of that stormy night. Within were some men moving about, looking like harmless idlers in the sun rather than brigands, and who merely glanced up when the two horsemen rode into the enclosure.

CHAPTER XVII.

DICK AND AIDS AT WORK.

Meanwhile, something had been taking place at Devil's Delight.

In the small hours of the morning, when the camp was in deepest slumber and the night was darkest, a man stole softly into the shanty city.

He moved along like a shadow, seemed familiar with the way, and knew where he was going. He went straight to the domicile occupied by Injun Inez, and there tapped lightly on the rear door.

He did not have to rap a second time. In a moment the door was opened a little way and a voice asked:

"Who is there?"

"A friend returned," was the response.

The door swung open at once, and the man entered the shanty quickly.

"Well, what success?" the woman asked.

"The best," the answer. "Have you done your part?"

"Yes, everything is arranged, and now it all depends on you. Dare you carry it out?"

"I don't know the meaning of the word fear, woman," was the rejoinder to that. "All I ask of you is to conduct me within the circle, as you have promised."

"When will you go?"

"At once."

"Wait; I will be ready in five minutes."

The woman went into another room, but soon returned, saying:

"I am ready. The secret I am about to disclose to you is known to but few, if, indeed, to any one besides myself. Not even the chief of the Flock of Forty knows it."

"So much the better for my plans, Inez. Have you provided the means, as agreed?"

"Everything is prepared."

They left the shanty, closing the door silently and moved off up the gulch.

Entering the pass we have before described, they proceeded for some distance in the direction of the old temple, but at length turned off at a sharp angle and climbed up the rocks.

Injun Inez led the way, climbing like a cat from point to point, directing her follower from time to time.

He, need we say, was Deadwood Dick.

At length a level place was reached, and on the other side of that was a narrow fissure between two gigantic rocks.

Into that fissure the old hag squeezed, Dick following her, and in a few moments it had widened sufficiently for them to walk with comfort. The way led downward.

Finally came some rough stone steps, and on reaching these the crone stopped to make a light.

"We'll need it," she explained, "and no danger of its being seen."

Feeling along a ledge, she soon found a

piece of fatty wood, which had evidently served her the same purpose on former occasions. This she lighted, and in a minute or so they could see their surroundings.

Deep below them yawned a huge chasm. The steps led downward around one side of this until lost in the blackness below. Overhead was a ragged vault, in nature's own handiwork, sloping away as far as the eye could reach—with the light the torch afforded. Down these steps Dick was conducted, until they terminated upon a hard floor of rock. This sloped upward gradually, and proceeding up that slope for some distance, they came finally to where the floor and roof almost met.

"This is the place," the woman said, in a low voice. "We are under the old temple. Here is the door, and this is the way it is opened, by turning this knob of stone half around in this direction. And here I will leave you. If you fail, it must not be known that I aided you; failure means your death."

That forenoon, in Devil's Delight, Tony Bly came forth from his shanty in style.

He was washed and combed and trimmed, his clothes were patched and brushed, both his feet were geared alike, and he had somewhere procured a semi-new hat.

By chance, or otherwise, Merry Mike was the first one to discover him in this metamorphosed condition, and he immediately called the attention of others to the matter. In a few moments Tony had quite a crowd of admirers standing around gazing at him.

"Begorra, ain't he foine?" cried Mike.

"He is stoopenjus, you bet!" another agreed.

"Mebby he is goin' ter git married to Injun Inez to-day," yet another remarked.

This last raised a howl of laughter, for, as elsewhere hinted, that had been one of the standing jokes of the camp for many a day.

"Where is the mayor?" asked the Keeleyized camp bum. "I must see him; I must see all of the boys together before I take my departure. This day I leave you for aye."

"Not goin' away!" exclaimed several at once.

"Yes, going away, but before I go I want to give you one treat all around that will keep my memory green for a while, at any rate. But, the caliph, the noble cazique; where is he? The treat will not be complete without our illustrious sovereign!"

"How do ye explet to trate?" asked Merry Mike. "Sure, Dick Kelly would not trate ye to a glass av wather out av his wash-bucket."

"Maybe not, but he will treat the boys for this," and the ex-bum drew a handful of gold from his pocket.

"By dhe powers!" cried Mike. "Do yez see that, me b'ys? Begorra, he has made a lick somewheres, sure as ye live!"

"Call up your friends," ordered Tony, soberly. "This is my last treat, and it will mark the last dollar of mine that shall ever go over a bar. Pass the word, and let every man in the camp partake!"

"Gee-whiz!" cried out Little Billy, who was one of the crowd, "but you do look killin', Tony! You had better keep out of mom's sight, or she may change her mind and take you, after all! Come, Mike, let's whoop et up fer Tony, and bring everybody out!"

"Agreed, me b'y!"

And so they did, one going in one direction and the other in the opposite, whooping in a way to test the strength of their lungs.

As a result, everybody was out in short order to learn what all the noise was about, and as soon as they heard the proclamation all who felt inclined to accept the invitation flocked in the direction of the Hang-up.

Meantime, Tony Bly had gone thither, and was making known his good intentions to the proprietor.

"Oi thought ye had reformed, Tony," said Kelly, before he heard all.

"Not for myself, but for my friends," explained Tony.

"Yis, but who is to put up—"

Tony displayed his wealth, and that was sufficient, and the first contingent of the thirsty townsmen having ranged themselves, the vile stuff was dealt out to them.

Tony handed over a sum sufficient to pay the bill, and more, and the men took their turns and changed places rapidly, some of them repeating when chance offered, and in the course of the next quarter hour there was hardly a man in the camp but had drunk Tony's health.

It had been next to impossible to observe who had not partaken, but among those who had not were Merry Mike, Tony himself, and some others, and Little Billy, of course.

So much for the treat, but there was something to follow.

In the course of the next hour men could be found asleep anywhere and everywhere around the camp.

They were dropping here and there like flies that had been partaking of the poisonous decoctions sometimes set for them, and where they dropped there they remained.

Nor did they awaken easily. By noon Tony Bly, Merry Mike, Little Billy and the others walked through the camp and did not see a dozen persons who were awake. And behind it all was the "fine Italian hand" of Deadwood Dick, Junior!

The reader must have guessed that these, too, like Injun Inez, were his allies in the task he had undertaken.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GRAND COUP.

When Sonora Sam and Samuel Hedgeworth rode into the Aztec temple, and down past the row of crumbling columns to the inhabited corner, Sonora Sam threw himself from the saddle, saying:

"Well, here we are, Mr. Hedgeworth. What do you think of our quarters here in this sacred place of old time? And what do you think your chances would be in trying to take a prisoner away from us by force? You would not stand the ghost of a chance!"

"I am ready to agree with you," assented the young man. "Let me see my father, and I will urge him to make whatever terms you demand—that is, within the range of the possible. Then release the man whose liberty I have already bought, and allow me to return with all haste. Would that I had the means to pay down, this moment."

An eagerness that was feigned.

"Ah! here you are, eh?" exclaimed a masked man, who at that moment appeared.

"Yes, chieftain," answered Sonora Sam, saluting. "And here is the man to see you about his father's release. The money for the other was put in the tree, as ordered."

"That was right; it has been taken care of. Well, young man, you may come this way, and you will see the fix your father is in. I think you will want to get him out of our hands just as quick as you can do the business. Come on with him, Sam."

The chieftain of the band led the way, stepping to where a temporary door had been put up in the place of the door of stone which had been battered down.

Opening this, he passed in, the others following.

The lighted lamp was hanging suspended from the ceiling of the room, as on the former occasion, and this, together with what light came in through the open door, served to reveal the situation.

There, chained to the wall, were Mr. Hedgeworth and Sigmund Bamford, looking sullen and despondent.

"Father!" the young man exclaimed, at the sight.

"What terms can you make, Sammy?" the prisoner sadly inquired.

"We must agree to the terms named and at once, father," was the rejoinder.

"I thought you would," said the chief of the band, with a laugh. "I have set the figure; you must arrange to get the money here as best you can."

"Call in your aids," requested Mr. Hedgeworth, "that everything may be done open and above-board. I will write the order, and you must then appoint a guard for my son so that he can make the journey in safety."

"That is business," assumed the chieftain. "Wait, I will have them here in a moment."

He stepped out, soon returning with two others.

These, like the leader himself, were masked, but masks were no protection against what they found prepared for them.

The moment they had passed the door there came a startling order for them to throw up their hands, and Mr. Hedgeworth and Mr. Bamford, the prisoners, were free and armed!

Not only these, but there were Deadwood Dick, Mike McTool, Little Billy, Tony Bly, and even Injun Inez, with others, all covering the four men with guns at full cock and ready for grim business. The bandits were too surprised to attempt defense.

"What do you think about it now, cut-throats?" demanded Deadwood Dick, as he stepped out into the full light. "If you move a finger, it will be the signal for your death!"

"Dhat's phwat it will, begob!" echoed Merry Mike.

"Trapped!" cried the chief of the Forty. "Bet your life you are!" shouted Little Billy. "Just as you deserved to be, too!"

He danced forward and was disarming them, while the others were narrowing the circle, keeping their guns aimed straight at their heads. There was no escape.

"Now, remove your masks!" ordered Deadwood Dick. "Or, I can do it for you, if you want me to, though it is hardly necessary, either, since I know you all. Mr. Garrat, we meet again! Franklin Furniss and son, how are you? You, Lewis Card, or Sonora Sam, glad to meet you!"

Dick's manner was blithe, but there was the keenest irony in his tone as he said this.

The prisoners could only stare their wonder.

"Curse you!" cried Furniss, the elder. "You have made a bold stroke, but you can never get out of here alive!"

"Mistaken, sir," Dick corrected. "You had the same opinion about our getting in, but you see we are here. We hold the winning hand, you incomparable rascals, and we know how to keep it."

"The Flock of Forty will deal with you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Dick. "Can a dragon fight with its head cut off? Besides, we have already taken care of your forty, or the most of them. Bind these carrion, Mike, and we'll escort them to Devil's Delight."

"Oi will dhat same," cried Mike, springing to obey; "and sure dhe divil ought to

be delighted w'd this day's work if he ever was!"

In a few minutes it was done, and by a little strategy all the rest of the band there at the old temple were taken. That having been achieved, the place was thoroughly searched, Bamford's bags of ransom money were found, and much other stuff of value.

At Devil's Delight the greatest surprise awaited the leaders of the Flock of Forty, for there were nearly all of their band, in a dead sleep, effect of the drug with which Injun Inez had doctored the liquors in the Hang-up Hotel. Tony Bly's treat had been with a purpose, having been a prearranged part of Deadwood Dick's admirable scheme.

The direct members of the Flock of Forty were pointed out by those who knew them, and all were made prisoners. The same was done with others who were indirectly connected with them, and as a result, Deadwood Dick and his aids had at least fifty prisoners to take back to Chihuahua and turn over to the Government, and not a few of them were American outlaws, as has been plainly set forth. Great was their surprise when they awoke out of their stupor.

"Well, my work is accomplished," remarked Deadwood Dick, when all had been taken care of, and he and his party had eaten their dinner, which they had taken care to prepare themselves.

"Yes, your particular object; but I am no better off," sighed Sigmund Bamford. "I owe my life to you, true, but we have still to clear up the mystery surrounding my stolen child."

"I said my work is accomplished," repeated Dick. "That was a part of the work I had undertaken, Mr. Bamford. Let me restore your son to you, sir," and he took Little Billy by the hand and led him forward.

"Great Heavens!" Bamford gasped. "It cannot be possible!"

"The likeness is enough, even without any further proofs," assumed Dick. "This boy is your lost son, Mr. Bamford. But Sonora Sam and Injun Inez can supply the proof positive."

Mr. Bamford passed his hand over his eyes in a dazed manner, while he listened to the revelation.

"The story is this," explained Deadwood Dick: "Your wife, before you married her, had a lover named Lewis Card. She rejected him—discarded him, as it were—for you. He swore that he would bring sorrow upon her for it. It was he who stole your boy. Having waited so long, your wife never thought of him, and seeing with what determination you went into the search, he was afraid to let it be known that he had taken his revenge. He gave the child into the keeping of Injun Inez, and through her I have learned the truth."

The truth it was, as was amply proven, and Sigmund Bamford was a happy man at last, yet for all a sad one, since his beloved wife could not rejoice with him in the finding of their boy. A peculiar birthmark on the boy's shoulder was the final and conclusive point in the chain of proofs presented.

The Flock of Forty were dealt with without mercy by the Mexican Government; every one was gibbeted, as he richly merited. Deadwood Dick was handsomely rewarded. More, he was commissioned to undertake another case immediately—a matter of State.

The Hedgeworths and their party could not thank him enough for what he had done for them, and they went on their way rejoicing.

Little Billy was sent at once to a good school; Injun Inez was taken care of, and

Tony Bly returned to the States, where, cured of the curse of rum, he regained something of the honor he had formerly enjoyed.

THE END.

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